THE

FORESTERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF SCOTTISH LIFE; AND,

THE TRIALS OF MARGARET LYNDSAY.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH: AND

T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

MDCCCXXV.

THE FORESTERS.

CHAPTER I.

Of the humble mansions that not many years ago were thickly interspersed through the romantic scenery of the Esk, between Roslin and Lasswade, there was not one more beautiful than that which bore the appropriate name of Dovenest. It was built on a gentle eminence that merely lifted it in safety above the highest water-mark of the river sweeping round the little sylvan peninsula; and the breath of smoke that rose from its hidden chimnies was even on the calmest day lost on the broad bosom of the overshadowing wood, before it could reach the naked cliff that rose like a pillar into the sky. Several glades, and even pasture-fields, lay concealed at no great distance up and down the stream; and a few steps could in either direction lead into prospects of confined but richest cultivation, where the houses of the more opulent looked out cheerfully, each over its own quiet pleasure-ground, nor seemed, in their unostentatious retirement, at all out of uni-

son with the character of the solitary or clustering cottages of the poorer inhabitants. But for a fantastic projection of rock, with its crown of drooping birch-trees, Dovenest would have commanded a view of the caverned cliffs of Hawthornden, and, indeed, even of Roslin Chapel. Although the Castle was not visible, the rooks were seen flying over its turrets; and on a calm day, the noise of the Linn was heard below the foundations of the old Place of Worship. The village Sabbath-bell sent its voice so distinctly down the glen that it sometimes seemed to be ringing close to the very Cottage; and on a warm still summer's-day, there was but one sound of bees from the broomy knoll of Dovenest, to the wall-flowers on the crevices of that hallowed Ruin. There was felt to be a little quiet world within itself; and the same stream—the same rocks—the same line of sky, bound together Cottage, Chapel, and Castle, in one spirit of harmonious beauty.

Dovenest was not a summer retreat for lawyer, citizen, or poet, although it had often been coveted both by matter-of-fact and imaginative men, and its architecture been made to undergo frequent alteration in the day-dreams of tasteful artists; but it had been for thirty years the dwelling of its obscure and industrious owner, Adam Forester, a gardener. Adam Forester had been proud of that humble professional name in the prime of life, when his good spade was his only fortune; and he desired no better, in after times, when by skill, labour, and integrity, he had accumulated suf-

ficient capital to purchase that pretty little property, and by degrees, spring after spring had made his nursery-garden the pride of all the glen, and to idlers from the City one of its rarest and most delightful attractions. The southern bank, which he had cleared from the embosoming wood, seemed to enjoy perpetual sunshine; and so happily sheltered was it by natural mounds and battlements, that often while there was a storm among the oaks above, not a blossom was shaken from his fruit-trees, and the blackbird continued to sing undisturbed from the top of the steady Larch that rose single from a grass-plat in the middle of the garden. That Larch was famous during early spring, in the perfect beauty of its tapering verdure, and glowing with a million cones of purple that lay profusely scattered over the long graceful branches that swept the mossy floor, up to the slender last year's shoot that scarcely supported the blythsome songster. Nothing could surpass the order and regularity prevalent over the parterres of flowers, the beds of seedlings, and the wider banks of infant forest trees, already distinguishable in shape and hue of leaf stalk and tendril, but all equally unlike the gigantic forms they were destined one day to become in park or mountain. The spirit of young vegetable life wantoned everywhere around, below the shadow of the ancient woods, and old Adam Forester, the gardener, unconsciously loved the flowers and plants, among a constant succession of which he had spent upwards of forty not unhappy years. He

had not reached his time of life without some heavy griefs; but when he went out to muse at even-tide, he felt, like the Patriarch of old, that God had to him been a God of mercy, and thought with profound peace of mind on the hour now assuredly near at hand, when he should be laid in the same grave with the mother of his children, her whom he had buried twenty years ago, but whose image had been with him to support and console, duly and without fail, at morning and evening prayers.

Adam Forester had enjoyed more of pure and real happiness than often falls to the lot of man in his condition of life, although, perhaps, that be sometimes the very happiest condition in the world. His mind, originally one of strength and sensibility, had received that best of all education, the education which untempted and unperverted nature bestows upon itself, during employment that is laborious but not slavish, and during leisure that is free for much thoughtfulness at least, if not for systematic study, in the interval benignly provided between the two twilights for the refreshment and restoration of every human soul. From youth to manhood, and from manhood to age, he had always been bettering his worldly circumstances; he had never made a single retrograde step in his lowly well-doing; and while many whom he acknowledged to be better than himself, had suffered sore chances and changes, going down in trouble to untimely graves, and others had in some few instances become absolute paupers from vice or misfortune,—he had

thankfully enjoyed continual increase of prosperity, and along with it an enlargement too of heart that enabled him to feel the blessing of Providence. Although he lived in a thatched house, with such temperate appetites as its frugal hearth could easily supply—wore on work-days the mean but decent apparel of a labourer—opened his Bible with a hand that labour had hardened—sat on the Sabbath in a pew among poor people—interchanged greetings on a footing of perfect equality with every honest individual of that class to whom by his birth he belonged, and required for the daily sustenance of his unambitious heart only the simple converse of working men; yet Adam Forester was not altogether a stranger to the society of persons occupying the more elevated stations of this life, nor in that society did he miss the respect due to his estimable character. In the way of his profession he had become known to many men of wealth and rank; and the plain dignity of his manners, especially as age began to add to the lineaments of his countenance that power of reverence which is superior to that of every mere artificial distinction, was acknowledged by all who had sense to discern and appretiate the natural and unalienable authority of intelligence and virtue.

Dovenest, therefore, although thus beautiful in its own seemingly romantic world, had never been the scene of any other joys and sorrows than such as belong necessarily and essentially to human nature in every condition. The worthy owner had suffered ma-

ny domestic afflictions, but all in the common course of nature; and with a wife who tenderly and reverently loved him, and had discharged every duty towards him and their children in joyfulness and gratitude, he had lived many long peaceful years. During those years an infant—a child—one blooming girl—a boy of much promise—and, saddest loss of all, a son grown up to manhood—had been taken away suddenly, or after lingering decay. Five funerals had there indeed been—before that blackest of them all, when the mother was carried to her rest. But these deprivations had been scattered over the length of full thirty years—mercifully timed, it might be said, had been the visits of the angel of death—and although there not unfrequently had been seasons when smiles, or at least any thing approaching to laughter, would have grated against the heart-strings of the whole saddened family, and when it almost seemed as if their happiness were never more to deserve that name, yet natural distress gradually yielded to natural comfort, and the survivors carried over upon one another, and into one another's hearts, the affection that had belonged to them that were no more seen, except in the startling visions of sudden waking recollection, or in the dreams of sleep.

Even the affliction that made Adam Forester a widower brought with it healing upon its wings. For, when his Judith died, she was not cut off suddenly in the prime of life, nor did she pine away in its fall; but after the grey hairs had been visibly mingled with the

once bright brown, an illness, neither frightfully short nor tryingly prolonged, extinguished the lamp of life that burnt clearly to the close, and with all the most anxious solicitudes of a mother's heart at rest, she was resigned to shut her eyes upon her husband and her two dutiful sons. Her sober matronly steps and quiet smiles were no more seen, and in a few years generally forgotten. But, in not a few neighbouring families, her image remained, as if her picture had hung upon the wall; and the poor continued to bless her who had not only relieved their hunger, but had given charity to their friendless souls. The lines of labour and advancing age were painfully deepened on the widower's face during the year she left him, and the neighbours all prognosticated that he would never recover the blow. But theirs was a common mistake; the old man was not forsaken in his bereavement; in a few weeks he took his place in his pew in the kirk; the lark called him to his garden, not perhaps from such sleep as he had once enjoyed; and although they who knew him intimately saw a change in all his demeanour, and heard a difference in the usual tones of his speech, yet to indifferent observers he was the same active industrious old man as before. Nor did Dovenest undergo any perceptible diminution of its cheerful neatness, except that there seemed about it a less gorgeous flush of flowers than formerly, and that the lustre of the latticed windows was not so spotless, and somewhat more thickly overgrown, now that one pruning hand was cold. But

Adam Forester, in his more awful hours, was not without a source of comfort, that every year flowed deeper and deeper in the midnight silence; while in his ordinary work-day life in the open air, he had the best of earthly solaces in a fair reputation, health yet unimpaired, a sound understanding, and a clear conscience; a sufficient competence against the evil of eld, two dutiful sons, and, above all, the love of labour, strong as that of life itself, that subdues within the heart a thousand vain anxieties, and changes the stern law of necessity, against which many fruitlessly rebel, into the voluntary choice of a calm and well-ordered life.

On the death of his wife, Adam Forester had been left with two sons, Michael and Abel. They had both received a regular education, and possessed more than ordinary abilities. Michael had, at one time, thought of becoming a clergyman, and had attended the University, but, on his mother's death, he felt it to be impossible to leave his father alone, and being fonder every month of that way of life, and deeply attached to the place of his birth, he resolved to follow his father's employment, and had now done so for many years. He was a man of staid deportment and quiet manners, but of deep and strong feelings—it may, indeed, be said passions—and of extraordinary strength of intellect. But he had no worldly ambition, and was satisfied to live the same homely and obscure life with his father. He was enough of a scholar to be able to read the Old and New Testaments in their original tongues,—and

his favourite studies, next to theology, circumscribed as they necessarily became, were natural history and astronomy. Each year brought, independently of reading, its own growth of inward knowledge; and Michael Forester of Dovenest had long been esteemed the first man in all the neighbourhood for general talents, and sound practical information in the business of life. His whole appearance betokened no ordinary character; and although he did not purposely keep aloof from the young men of the place, his infinite and unapproachable superiority was felt by them all, and he was looked upon as the equal of the parish minister, and other persons of education and authority. Proud was the old man of such a son—but it was a pride that now and then only made its way into a heart fortified with a far higher principle, that of religious gratitude; and, as they worked in their garden together, the grey-headed father would sometimes rest his withered hand on his spade, and leaning over it as if to pause from his work, bless his son in a fervent prayer, nor care if his dim eyes poured down upon the ground a shower of passionate tears. Working together day after day from morning to night, and sitting together every evening, there was often long silence between them, but never any dearth of inward thoughts; and each heart was as fertile of affectionate feelings as the soil of the garden beneath the common labour of their hands. The very helplessness of old age was felt to be a happy state, in the presence of such a protector; and when the old man

would lay himself down, during the heat of the day, beneath the shadow of the sycamores, for a single hour of rest, reluctantly availing himself of the privilege of threescore and ten years, his closing eyes could not help seeing, in his dutiful son, as it were the figure of an angel watching over his sleep.

Abel, the younger brother, although now far less deserving than Michael, was notwithstanding almost as dear to his father; for strong instinctive affection will not yield to the law of desert, and the frailties, the follies, and even sins of children will often mournfully endear them to their parents. Abel, too, in face, in eyes, the colour of hair, and the tone of voice, was the very image of his mother; and grievous as had been his misconduct, that overpowering resemblance had never pleaded for him in vain. There was also much that was redeeming in his amiable but uncertain character; and how could a father long retain wrath, or even strong displeasure towards one so ready to repent, so warm in his affections, and when away from evil associates, so perfectly winning in all his ways, and so reconciled even to an active and industrious life? Lively, versatile, and ingenious,—he was, indeed, when at home the light and the music of the house and garden, and the old man thought, and still thought, and fondly deluded himself into conviction often broken and as often repaired, that Abel was about to reform, and to become a credit to him like Michael in his declining days. Although Abel had

not yet absolutely disgraced himself by any dishonest or dishonourable action, a mist hung over his reputation both in town and country; his few known associates were persons of profligate habits; rumours were afloat in the neighbourhood of an indefinite, but distressing kind; and it was the belief of all that ere long he would bring himself to disgrace and ruin. His father tried to shut both his eyes and his ears, but still he saw and heard enough to fill his mind with dismal apprehensions; and now that all the past was peace—now that he could look not only without one single pang on the grave-stone above his Judith, and the other five dead ones, all of them long ago so tenderly beloved, but even with the profound satisfaction of expecting rest,—he felt it cruel to be disturbed almost at death's door, by a son to whom he had been perhaps but too indulgent, and whose errors seemed, month after month, to be darkening into wickedness. Oh! that Abel were reformed! thought often the old man—and that prayer was sometimes worded in his sleep—then might I yield up my spirit to its Maker! Abel knew well his father's grief, and often wept bitterly like a child before his tremulous rebuke—too like a child, for his tears were soon dried; gay smiles too delightful to a forgiving father took their place, and after the deep but transient calm of reconcilement which Abel had a heart tender enough to feel, but not firm enough to remember, away he flew like a bird, and disappeared for months in the unknown dissipation and vice of the

city. "My boy loves me as kindly as ever, but he reverences me no more, and my power over him is but as of a shadow. O, Michael! when I am dead, try to save poor Abel—for if evil befall him, methinks my bones will not rest in the grave!"

Such words as these were not lost upon Michael; for, independently of his filial reverence, he loved his brother Abel with exceeding affection. Indeed, the very difference in their characters, pursuits, and habits, endeared them to each other;—and while the elder brother could not help being won by that mirth and merriment, that frolic and whim so foreign to his own nature, but so congenial with the whole frame of Abel's, that unthinking boy could not but venerate in Michael that irreproachable practice and those uncompromising principles in which he found himself to be so deplorably deficient in the hour of trial. The disparity in their age also, (for Michael was the elder by upwards of ten years,) gave an endearing character to their mutual affection. It had always preserved between them an unbroken integrity of feeling, without the deadening or alienating interruptions of jealous or angry moods. Abel no more thought of ever quarrelling with Michael than with his father himself; and if ever Michael had occasion to chide or reprove him, the remonstrance was indeed fatherly in spirit and in word, tempered at the same time by the sense of the feebler authority of brotherhood, and breathed forth as a confidential communication between friend and friend.

"You must not think that I love Abel better than you, Michael, although sometimes it would even seem as if the dear unhappy boy did indeed drive you out of my heart. No—no—no—you, Michael, are my best beloved son—boy, lad, and man the same—true at all times to me, your aged father, and to your God. If ever I have been silent—cold—harsh—or sullen towards you, my son—I ask your forgiveness, for in truth age chills even something of the warmth at a father's heart."

The father and son were sitting together on a bench in a sort of small natural arbour that faced the light of the setting sun; and as Michael looked on the old man's face, he felt that he had never before noticed the wrinkles so deep, nor seen over all his countenance so strong a shadow of the world to come. He knelt down and asked a blessing. Tenderness and awe were like a religion in his spirit; and as the withered hands were laid upon his head, he felt as if a human parent were interceding for him with a divine, and that such prayers would not be unheard in Heaven. At that moment light footsteps were heard, and Abel stood before the opening of the arbour.

There was a wild and unsettled expression in his eyes, a feverish flush over his cheeks, and his whole demeanour was disturbed. Self-dissatisfaction and shame, mixed with an angry recklessness, sadly obscured that face on which a few years ago every one that knew it looked with pleasure and affection. Yet the unhappy youth could not now divest himself of

that respect—that veneration with which he had from his very heart always treated his father. The scowl which he had summoned to his brow gave way before the solemn look of the old man's dim eyes, and struck at once into remorse for the mere show of disrespect to his father, Abel hung down his head and wept. When he found voice, he said, "Father, I am going to leave Dovenest for good and all, and to-morrow I set off for England with Will Mansell. You must not ask me any questions—I could not think of going without coming to ask your forgiveness and your blessing." The old man, who had long feared the worst of his son, now felt that the worst had almost befallen him, for Mansell was a man of a ruined reputation, and known to be familiar with criminals. "Yes—yes—Abel, here is my blessing—and my forgiveness," and the old man rose up and kissed his undutiful son with many tears. Meanwhile, Michael retired a short distance from the arbour, and when he returned to take farewell of his brother, Abel was gone. "Oh! Michael, when I am dead—and this parting has taken some months from the year I might have had to live, never lose your pity for Abel, for much I fear will he stand in need of pity, hurrying on to disgrace or destruction." "My brother shall never want," said Michael, "while these hands have strength to work, while there is water in the channel of the Esk, and corn grows up on its banks. But I will go after him, and perhaps he will return to his father's house."—"No—Michael,

—he will never return—never in my time, at least—and if he does return, it will be as a wretched beggar, aye worse than a beggar, a criminal, flying perhaps from justice, and his life forfeit to the law."

That severe passion of grief did not, however, endure long in a heart that in all its sufferings had found what strength there is in submission. The old man hearkened to comfort from his elder son, and tried to convince himself that his fears might prove to have been altogether ungrounded. And a letter from Abel about a month after, written in a kind and cheerful spirit, restored him apparently to his usual composure, so that it might be said that Dovenest was again happy.

CHAPTER II.



Among the lowly households closely connected in ancient friendship with the family at Dovenest, there was none so dear on any account as that of Sprinkald, a cottage that stood by itself in a sheltered holm, a few fields from Lasswade. It had been built by a native of the village, a prosperous tradesman, who died in the prime of life, leaving a widow and one daughter. His widow did not long survive him; and the child was left to the care of a female relation who had resided in the family, and who loved the orphan, Agnes Hay, as tenderly as if she had been her mother. This excellent person had lost her husband many years before, and had no children. Her whole income consisted of the very moderate jointure which she enjoyed as the Widow of a Clergyman, from the best of all Charitable Institutions; but this, added to the little fortune of her ward, was a complete independence, and enabled them to lead the same life to which they had been accustomed, without difficulty or privation. Agnes Hay had, therefore, never felt what it is to be an

orphan. She had lost both her parents before she was eight years old; and at that innocent and joyful age, less than one single summer suffices to wipe away the bitterest tears, although their source is still left open in the unpainful affection of the heart. Perhaps those early afflictions gave a somewhat deeper tone of pensiveness to a character naturally thoughtful and sedate; and no doubt the remembrances of her dead parents survived more distinctly and tenderly in that retired and almost solitary life. Being an only child, and having had few play-mates, her thoughts and feelings naturally reverted to the past, so that the bygone happiness of her childhood was never entirely forgotten, but continued to blend itself with all those unsought enjoyments which nature graciously provides for the expanding affections. Few incidents or events had occurred to diversify her calm and contented life, nor had any strong emotions ever disturbed the tranquillity of her innocence. Each succeeding Sabbath found her humbly trusting in that contrite spirit, which even the most innocent must feel when joining in the services of religion; and weeks, months, and years had glided by, leaving her now in the prime of youth, a favourite with all the families in the neighbourhood, even with those to whom she was hardly more known than by appearance or name; while at those firesides where she was a familiar guest, she was beloved with a perfect love for all those delightful endowments that showed themselves more attractively in the unconscious simplicity of her mild

and gentle manners, and almost veiled her beauty itself under that charm of character which belonging peculiarly to the gifted individual is felt to be at once permanent and irresistible.

Neither Michael Forester nor Agnes Hay knew that they were in love with each other. Indeed, for two or three years past, it had almost seemed as if there had been some slight shadow thrown over the friendship of the two families. Accidental causes, such as will often arise in the least varied lot, had made the footpath less frequently trodden that led from Deyenest to Sprinkeld. But where there is sincere and well-founded mutual affection in good hearts, it remains unimpaired among all hindrances, interruptions or absence. Pleasant remembrances of words and looks supply the place of actual interchanges of kindness; and, perhaps, the softened images of innocent delight, returning of their own accord upon our hearts, do more than any thing else in this world attach us to those with whom that delight had been enjoyed. Agnes Hay was frequently hearing the character of Michael Forester spoken of by those whom she most respected in terms of the highest praise,—his talents, his industry, his uprightness, and what was even more touching to her heart than them all, his filial piety, and his fond attachment to his infatuated brother. Sometimes she thought what happiness it would have been had she been his daughter—or his sister—or any near blood relation, so that she might have had

the privileges of an inmate of his household. She had indeed scarcely one single relation living, but Aunt Isobel, as she had called from her infancy the good old Lady who was her protectress. Such thoughts passed through her heart oftener than she was aware, but without any disturbance of feeling; for, although she interchanged affectionate greetings with Michael Forester every Sabbath at church, and not unfrequently saw him on ordinary week-day occasions, her heart was entirely free from passion. Never had she fallen into one single vain dream of him and his dwelling; so that had he married another, it did not seem to Agnes that such an event would have affected, or at least diminished the happiness of her contented life. And yet, when Aunt Isobel, in speaking of his excellence, had once said, what a happy woman would be the wife of Michael Forester, Agnes had unconsciously turned away her face, and as she did so, her eyes fell upon the geraniums in all their rich and variegated glow which she had received from him, and had tended with assiduous care, as she herself thought entirely for the sake of their own beauty.

With Michael Forester the case was somewhat different. He was fifteen years older than Agnes, and although the growing charms of her womanhood had gradually inspired him with far other feelings than those with which he had been accustomed to regard the pretty little child that he had often led by the hand through his gardens, and sent away happy as a fairy with a bunch

of flowers—yet a sense of the disparity of years, which to him seemed far greater than it was in reality, kept down, as if it were even in his conscience, any fonder affection for Agnes as she had been stealing into the beauty of her prime. It seemed impossible that she could love him; and that belief in the mind of such a man overcame all vain hopes, and reconciled him without much pain to the thought of some day seeing Agnes Hay the wife of another. He therefore strove with himself, and not altogether unsuccessfully, not indeed to abstain from her society, for that was impossible, but to regard her at all times as one to whom he could never be more than a friend, or a brother, or a father. Sometimes in the quiet of a beautiful summer evening, when in his silent leisure his mind unconsciously framed pictures of the future, he felt that to Agnes Hay he could be all these, and more, far more than them all; that to see her beautiful countenance at that lattice window,—her delightful figure walking along that green,—her white arms employed in training the roses around the trellice-work of that humble porch,—to hear her name him in the familiar words of love, and tune her soft voice especially for his ear—thoughts like these did sometimes indeed overpower him—for he had led a pure and unstained life, vice had withered not one fibre of his heart, he had wasted none of his best emotions on unworthy objects, so that his visions of domestic happiness were bright and strong, and he looked on them with the same solemn, devout and sacred spirit with which on the

Sabbath-day, he entered the place set apart for worship. But still the belief recurred that Agnes could not love him—that she would one day be another man's wife—and in depriving himself of the dangerous enjoyment of his own loving, almost impassioned thoughts—he felt that such self-denial brought its own recompense, and heightened that happiness which Providence had allowed him to enjoy without either fear or blame, and which he humbly acknowledged was sufficient for contentment and gratitude.

One beautiful Sabbath-evening, Michael Forester was walking by himself along the banks of the Esk, and met Agnes Hay going to Roslin to bring home her Aunt, who had that day attended Divine service in that church. The meeting at such a time, and in such a state of their affections, was felt by them both to be more than usually happy. Agnes took Michael's arm with cheerful willingness, and they spoke of every thing most interesting to the welfare of their respective homes. The sweet serenity of the afternoon was in perfect unison with that of their own hearts, and Agnes, the orphan Agnes, with such a friend by her side, felt as calmly confident of the duration of her peace, as if she had had a hundred kind and rich relations alive, and the future provided and fenced in against the intrusion of any earthly calamities. All the woods were ringing with vernal delight and joy, and her countenance, whose general character was meek and pensive, was now tinged with the very light of gladness—her

steps, usually so graceful in their composure, were now no less so in the buoyancy of exhilaration, and without doing the slightest violence to the native and prevalent modesty of her demeanour, the innocent creature's perfect happiness enlivened every attitude and every motion, while not altogether unconscious, perhaps, of the power of her beauty, she stepped over stone and stalk, on their devious hill-side track, through the overhanging trees whose branches sometimes almost impeded their progress, and touched their heads with the first odorous buds of an early spring.

Dovenest and its gardens lay before them at a sudden bend of the river. The Cushat-dove was sounding his deep song in the pines behind the low thatched roof, and in front the bright Golden Oak, whose foliage preceded by at least a fortnight that of all the other trees, shone in the setting sun. "Will you cross the stepping-stones, my dear Agnes, and see how this Spring promises in our gardens? You have not been within our gate once during this finest and most forward of all Aprils, and to-morrow is May-day." Agnes was glad to comply, and they descended into the channel of the river, where, at the head of a stream that formed a small waterfall, there was a natural ledge of rock, over which, when the water was low, it was easy to cross the Esk. The showery April had however slightly flooded the stream, and while Agnes was speaking of going round by the wooden bridge, Michael Forester took her gently in his arms, and in a few mo-

ments let her down from his breast, in all her blushing beauty, on the turf of his own paternal acres. The heart within that manly breast, by habit and duty in general so calm, beat as loudly as if it were the heart of fear itself in an unexpected peril. Her pure breath had been close to his cheek, closer than it had ever before been since she was a child, and he had felt on his side the motion of that virgin bosom, where purity, innocence and loveliness were folded up together in most beautiful repose. "She is an orphan," thought Michael —oh! that this very blessed day I could win her heart!" and hope came to him from the unoffended expression of her downcast eyes, as they walked arm in arm towards his house. Few words were uttered by him—and none by Agnes—till they entered the little white gate, with its arch of woodbine and sweetbriar; and as it closed behind them, Michael Forester felt suddenly that what he loved most on this earth was now within the boundaries of his own dwelling. Dearer was she to him than all his other best and happiest possessions—than all other remembrances—all other hopes—even than his father's grey hairs. Yet at the very time that he thus knew in the tumult of his heart, that the fair and meek orphan was, and must for ever be to him life itself, and that without her life would be as death, yet his other human affections were not lost or swallowed up in that stronger love, but rather all comprehended within its influence, so that he loved both fa-

ther and brother, and his other friends, better for the sake of his own Agnes Hay.

With a faltering voice, which he in vain tried to compose, Michael Forester said, with great tenderness, "The time was—Agnes—when you came almost every day to Dovenest. Then it was only week after week—now I may say it is only month after month—and in future, perhaps, it may be only year after year. Yet it might be better for me if it were so—for, Agnes, you will be the wife of another soon perhaps—and whenever that happens, may the blessing of God fall upon you, but from that day shall I be the most miserable of men. I love you, Agnes—but I know that you cannot love me—it is impossible!" And as the image of the fair child passed before him, dancing along the very walk where they now stood, with garlands of flowers wreathed round her small waist and arms, he felt with a pang that Agnes could not now look on him as a lover, whom she must have so long regarded with such other feelings, and he remained silent in his despair.

The whole heart of Agnes Hay seemed to herself to have undergone a deep change since she had met Michael only an hour ago; but, in truth, she had for years loved him in the undisturbed innocence of her gentle nature. She had, oftener than she knew, thought of him, as a certain despondency would sometimes come over her when musing on her orphan state; and therefore this avowal of his love, although wholly unexpected,

did not find her altogether unprepared. The words, heard at first with a delightful doubt of their meaning, reached, before Michael had ceased speaking, the very core of her heart; and never having had any attachment to any other person, beyond that of mere ordinary kindness, she felt that she could give him all that her life had ever contained, without reserve of one single transitory feeling. "Impossible to love Michael Forester!—no—no—say not so—I have loved you ever; and I will love you as long as I know to love all that is good, worthy, and most estimable in a Christian husband." That one last word was sufficient for Michael Forester's perfect happiness, and he folded this beautiful orphan in as warm and reverential an embrace as ever brought woman to man's beating bosom.

They walked for a while silent and composed through the dewy arbours; and stood hand in hand beside the dial, shadowless at the sweet hour of eight, in the last dewy evening of April. All around was orderly—peaceful—prosperous, and beautiful. Then, as if by the same impulse, they bent their way towards the house; and Michael fervently blessed his Agnes as she stepped across the threshold. They sat down together in the neat little parlour, whose window looked up the Esk upon a home-scene hemmed in by a fantastic sweep of wooded rocks. The large Family Bible was lying open on the table, and Michael taking the hand of his Agnes, laid it upon the sacred volume, and in that betrothment, with a reverential prayer of thanksgiving,

they vowed to love one another until death. Agnes shed a few tears over the blessed page, but they were such tears as nature consecrates to her best affections, and assuredly were not of evil omen. Michael Forester kissed others away from her sweet eyes, as her head rested upon his breast, and in that tender and sacred embrace in which he folded his betrothed, and in which a pious spirit expressed its gratitude to Heaven for an unhoped and boundless happiness, Agnes felt beyond all possibility of being deceived, that she had committed her lot in this life to a man who knew the value of innocence, and in wedlock would cherish and respect it. But voices were heard near the porch, and although Agnes knew well whose they were, and had nothing to fear from such intruders, yet a new tremor crept over her at their approach, and her heart that had beat tranquilly in the arms of her lover, palpitated violently as she arose to meet her own Aunt Isobel and old Adam Forester.

A few words from Michael explained the reason of all those unusual tears, and that speechless confusion. Aunt Isobel could not but give herself some little credit for having always internally predicted that this would be a marriage some day ; but now that her few doubts and misgivings were removed, and she found that she was, in good truth, a prophetess, she could not help weeping in her joy, as she thought that now, die when she might, her beloved orphan would not be left desolate. The old man had always loved Agnes

as his own child, and had sometimes allowed himself to wish that Abel had been deserving of such a wife. Now that his eyes were opened to what he had never before suspected, and saw Michael in possession of such a treasure, he blessed her with a fervent voice, and pronounced her name, as if he dwelt upon the sound, for the name of the daughter he had lost was Agnes, and he had read it but a few hours ago on her gravestone. The thought of poor Abel, and his cureless follies, passed across the old man's mind, and he felt that, if that dear boy would but repent and reform, it would be a blessed lot to be gathered with the dead, for that then the whole happiness possible to human life would have been his, and it would therefore be time to depart. But the closing shades of evening warned the party to break up—the stars were already faintly visible —and Agnes, who did not forget others in her own happiness, feared that Aunt Isobel might suffer from the cold dews. So, in a few minutes, they left Dove-nest; but not before the evening psalm had been sung, in which the voice of Agnes, silvery sweet, but somewhat tremulous, touched Michael's heart, in his own house, with profounder emotion than his nature had ever experienced before,—while the old man, unable to withstand the beauty of its holiness, could not continue his part in the sacred melody, but bowed down his head, and, with a broken voice, breathed a few words of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER III.

FEW ostentatious ceremonies marked these humble nuptials; yet decent preparations had been made for their change of life, and the marriage-day of Michael Forester and Agnes Hay was almost a kind of holiday in Lasswade and its neighbourhood. Some little idle gossip there had no doubt been about the happy couple for at least a month before the union, for Agnes was not only beautiful, but an heiress, and it is surprising what interest some good people take in the dearest concerns of those with whom they are not perhaps at all acquainted, but for whom they hold themselves entitled even to judge and decide, from the single circumstance of having seen them at church or market. Some wise critics in marriage matters could not help thinking that Michael Forester, although a most excellent man, was somewhat too old and grave for so very young and lovely a bride, and were anxious to justify that opinion by adding some ten years to his useful life. Some conscientious persons again, were much afraid that Agnes Hay, who had been bred up

daintily under the care of her Aunt, who it was well known had always taken upon herself the whole trouble of house-keeping, would make but an indifferent wife to a man who followed a laborious profession, and would probably expect more activity and frugality than it was likely he would find in a young woman spoiled by ease and indulgence. Others wondered, and of their wondering could find no end, what would become of poor Mrs Irvine? Young Mrs Forester would surely never be so heartless as to leave her by herself at her advanced time of life; and yet, should she take the good old lady with her to Dovenest, who could say to a certainty that she would prove agreeable to the husband, or to his father, who was well known to be rather a particular sort of man, of perfect integrity, but of a very imperfect temper?

These serious topics had been very seriously discussed at the tea-tables of Lasswade, Roslin, and their neighbourhood; and had given rise to many clashing and conflicting opinions. All anxiety, however, in the public mind about Aunt Isobel was removed; for, even on the very marriage-day, she went with her dearly beloved Agnes from Sprinkeld to Dovenest. Her own parlour there had been prepared for her weeks before, and a pretty parlour it was, the very same in which she had first known that Michael and Agnes had pledged their troth,—with a low roof and one window down to the floor, a window that, but for weekly pruning, would soon have been blinded by the clustering roses, and

from which she could see a little waterfall, woods, and rocks, on either side, a few pasture-fields, here and there the roof of a half-hid house, or the blue smoke from chimneys concealed entirely in the groves of Dryden.

The summer months passed over Dovenest in perfect happiness; and that silent and somewhat melancholy spirit that, for a few years, had lain on the house and grounds, was now almost wholly dispelled. Although the old man could never, for one day, forget his Abel, yet Agnes filled up the void in his heart. In all things she was indeed a daughter. There was no interference however slight with his habits, formed insensibly during the lapse of so many years,—no hindrance from household arrangements ever met him in any of his own peculiar ways, from morning to night,—no formal officiousness ever caused him trouble by its ill-timed attempts to prevent or remove it—no unimportant word—no unsympathising look ever made him feel that there was a separation between the souls of the old and young. But Agnes, from the first week of her abode at Dovenest, had felt and understood, with the delicate and fine discrimination of a loving nature, the prevalent spirit of the household. In the fearless confidence of an affection which was to endure for life, she gently took upon herself the management of all those little concerns necessary for her father's comfort, and walked about the place with as familiar and unrestrained a happiness as if she had herself been born in the house, and had attended on her father from the earliest years

of moral reason. Sprinkeld itself, pleasant place as it was, and the scene of her whole previous happy life, was not forgotten, but removed, as it were, far back into the distance of years. For in her husband's house was her whole heart centered—beyond the white garden-gate her thoughts never strayed, and all the beautiful or affecting images, which other happy days and scenes had supplied, were now all collected together within the bounds of Doverest. A thousand delightful visits which she had made there long ago, and had forgotten, now rose distinctly to her remembrance; she recollected the voice—the figure—the occupation—the kindness to her then a child of him who was now her husband; and in all those renewals of the past made involuntarily, and by the mere force of affection, there was nothing different from what she now experienced, but although at that time imperfectly understood, the same goodness, integrity, and peace had been witnessed, within whose bosom she now lived in love and gratitude.

Michael Forester led outwardly just his usual life. But the whole world had to him undergone a sudden and blessed transformation. Hitherto, he had been happy in the cultivation and enlargement of his intellect—in the discharge of his duties—and in the indulgence of filial and paternal affection. These pleasures were with him still, but now a being, simpler, purer, more innocent far,—more benignant towards all her fellow-creatures, and more entirely pious to her Crea-

tor, than he felt it possible, that he himself, or any other man could be—laid herself and her whole life in trust within his bosom. Such blessedness, only a few months before, he had not even ventured to imagine, much less to hope. Agnes Hay he indeed had always loved, but only as one most fair and good, who was to be nothing more to him, and every thing to some happier man. Now, their lives were blended together, and he felt his whole character elevated and purified by the union. Not a day now passed without absolute happiness, without calm and deep enjoyment. Every day was now divided into hours of different delight, so that life itself, which formerly escaped away unnoticed, year following year in confusion within the memory, seemed now to be prolonged by the continual and uninterrupted succession of employments for the hand and the heart, each giving way to the other, but when over, still all remembered.

Adam Forester now worked but seldom, and when he did, only for his amusement. This his son insisted upon; for there was no need to conceal from his father that his strength was much decayed, and that his work-days were over. We know not what causes within the soul may affect, for good or evil, the body of old age. It seemed as if all Abel's misconduct, and even his desertion of home, had not touched the old man's frame so strongly as the perfect happiness with which he now saw himself surrounded. That happiness had given a shock—a gentle one no doubt, but still not unper-

ceived—to that frame which had borne undepressed and unfaltering the weight of threescore and ten laborious years, with all their inevitable anxieties and sorrows. His hand, long so steady, had now more than a slight tremble when lifted up in prayer; even with his glasses he could read the Word of God no more; but the voice of Agnes, soft and low as it was, was still not indistinctly heard by his now dulled ear, when louder tones were all undistinguishable; and on her arm alone would he lean in his Sabbath-walk along the Esk, and confess to her his dutiful daughter, that an unpainful sense of weakness told him to hold himself ready for perhaps a sudden summons. But such solemn thoughts were reserved for solemn times; and so cheerful were his ordinary converse and demeanour, that it was remarked by all his neighbours, that although there might be a change for the worse in his bodily frame, yet that the youth of Adam Forester's mind seemed indeed to have been renewed.

But the happiness of this household would have been incomplete without Aunt Isobel. She was indeed the most lively and cheerful of all possible old ladies, blest with untameable good spirits, and that happy constitutional temperament that cannot abide the pressure of unnecessary or undue sorrows. Having been all her life long, from mere childhood, thrown upon her own resources, and accustomed to a busy, bustling, and careful life, all her energetic qualities had been cultivated to the utmost, and she looked upon idleness as at once

the greatest of sins and of punishments. She was always doing something, and would have found some regular employment even in the solitary cell of a prison. Yet, although constantly on the alert, she was never teasing nor troublesome in her activity,—although perpetually moving about, she was never in any body's way, and in the midst of her multifarious concerns, she always wore a smiling face, as if perfectly mistress of her business, and sure of the result, which result was never her own ease, of which she at no time thought, but the ease, comfort, or happiness of others. She was not much of a literary woman, although her powers of wit, humour, and raillery, would have set many a blue-stocking aghast, but nevertheless she had her Album. A formidable quarto it was, and therein had she copied, in a neat old-fashioned hand, full of dexterous contractions, and in an orthography original and ingenious, almost every receipt, however recondite, known to the then culinary world. Indeed, that book of magic told how best to do every thing that could be done in any house, from hall to hut. And although Aunt Isobel had never had an opportunity of displaying her knowledge and powers on a very splendid scale, yet had it been acknowledged by the whole world, that Sprinkeld was a perfect model of the most beautiful order and neatness that ever was seen, and that every thing within doors, just as without, seemed to go on of itself by some natural process, change succeeding change without any apparent effort, like the very seasons.

With a heart full of tenderness, and alive to every kind human feeling, Mrs Irvine, for that was Aunt Isobel's name, made no pretence to sensibility. On the contrary, she was much averse to the shedding of tears, which she thought should be reserved for solemn occasions, frequent enough, as she had herself experienced, in this uncertain world. Although the most charitable of Christians in thought, word, and deed, she disliked the whining even of real poverty and distress; and often gave alms with a severe countenance, which some finer spirits might probably think dimmed the merit, and marred the beauty of the charitable deed. But Mrs Irvine thought neither of the merit nor the beauty of her limited charities,—they were from a kind, humble, and pious heart, and she thought her Maker would be best pleased when he beheld her relieving, under his providence, the wants of the worthy, and sometimes even giving unto the vicious and the wicked, since their wants are indeed the greatest and the most mournful that can befal the children of men. Hers was a deep, still, unostentatious religion, that but slightly coloured her outward demeanour upon weekdays; but duly as the Sabbath came, her whole appearance, person, and deportment were calmed and elevated. Every worldly care, however laudable in itself at other times, was now thrown aside with her weekly garments; those quick, busy steps became composed and even dignified; that sharp shrill voice was subdued into a pleasant lowness; her face, which

had never at any time been more than comely, but always expressive of goodness and intelligence, was now almost beautiful in its tranquillity, with her grey hair decently braided over her open and yet unwrinkled forehead; and as, in her black-silk gown, which were her widow's weeds thirty years ago, and had never been worn but on Sabbaths, she took her place in her pew in the kirk, and placed before her the Bible which her husband had given her on her wedding-day, there was not perhaps in all the congregation one more like a lady than she, if such a distinction may be thought of in such a place, while assuredly there was not one more truly a Christian.

How then could the family at Dovenest be otherwise than happy? It seemed to Michael and Agnes as if the first summer of their marriage, even independently of their own joy, was most especially beautiful. Never in the memory of Adam Forester himself had there been so many soft, warm, and dewy nights, so many cloudless and sunbright days. In spring the frost had spared the blossoms—the summer insects had not touched the fruits—and the autumn had come mildly to gather her ripened riches.

CHAPTER IV.

The merry Christmas-week was just over, with all its festivities, and the new-year had begun to open auspiciously on the family at Dovenest, when one forenoon a stranger of most respectable appearance came into the garden, and inquired for Michael Forester. They retired into an inner-room, and the visitor did not take his leave for upwards of an hour. Michael accompanied him to the gate, and on his return into the house, his disturbed and troubled countenance did not for a moment escape the notice of his wife. Indeed, she had never before seen her husband so agitated, and knew well enough that something most disastrous must have happened. Her fears were instantly for Abel; although she could not help dimly apprehending some evil personal to Michael himself, so haggard, and even ghastly was the expression of his long, dark, and gloomy silence. She followed him into his room, and sitting down by his side, took hold of his hand, and looked up to his face, but without smiling or uttering a word. Her husband looked on her with gentle, but sad, and even

weeping eyes, and folding her to his bosom, said,—"Abel has ruined himself and all of us for ever. Yes, Agnes, he has beggared us all—and, oh! Agnes, what is worse—far far worse than beggary, he has committed a fearful and a fatal crime—is a forger—and a felon—may die the death of shame—and the white head of the old man may yet be brought to the dust in agony and dishonour. Yes—it will kill him—Abel has murdered his father—Abel whom he loved so tenderly—Abel whom he will yet weep over in forgiveness, when his tongue no more is able to pronounce a blessing. Poor lost unhappy boy! we will all of us forgive him—and, oh! Agnes! that the wide sea were now rolling between him and us, so that the dreadful arm of the law might not reach him, and his life be safe from the cruelty of justice in a foreign land."

The time had now come, soon and unexpectedly, when Agnes felt herself called upon to exert that power which her heart told her resided in its pious innocence. No repining pang shot through that instructed heart—no selfish grief, when thus told suddenly that poverty was to be her lot—no woeful disappointment of lawful hopes which it had been her duty to cherish—no vain wish—no idle thoughts flung back to the independent retirement of Sprinkeld—but with the whole passion of love that existed in her nature, she embraced her husband's neck, and with every kindest and most encouraging word, addressed to his own ear, mingled prayers of holiest fervour for his peace of mind to the Giver of

all mercies. "Oh! Michael, what need we care for poverty—nay, poor can we never be, although all our worldly substance may have melted like the snow. For Abel we must for ever weep—and also for our father—but Michael—my Michael—yield not to your despair—he will escape—he will escape—fear it not—and when we hear and know that he is safe, happier shall we all be than ever—although that, indeed, is impossible, for, since I was your wife, too happy have I been for any one in this mortal world."

It was fortunate that Adam Forester had gone, this sunny forenoon, to Roslin, and thus escaped hearing this intelligence, which, no doubt, the stranger would have communicated to him had he been at home. In a wonderfully short time, Michael recovered first from the fever, and then from the stupor of that great grief. Agnes had had no arts of allurement or fascination, when she was a maiden—but in her unreserved simplicity had she given him her affection. Nor since her marriage had she ever sought to sway his mind, either in trifling or serious concerns, but by the truth and purity of disinterested love, which had no other object in this life but to make him happy. Now, she had made use not of many words, nor yet of very many tears, but those that were said and shed had done their office, and her husband was perfectly composed in this most severe affliction. As he looked on her calm, still beautiful face almost smiling, and which, had it not been for the thoughts of Abel, would most assuredly have smil-

ed with its usual untroubled sweetness on the prospect of poverty or even want, he could not but feel the utter worthlessness of all other possessions; while the hopeful light of her eyes beaming fondly upon him forced him to believe that his brother would escape, and that the worst evil he had feared need no more haunt his imagination. Each tear as it fell at times down her cheek upon his—each almost repressed sigh—each whisper of comfort when no word was syllabled, and each consoling sentence of wisest words, when her emotion permitted utterance to her calm voice, restored him more and more nearly to his usual tranquillity. A sort of haze hung over the evil that had befallen—its most hideous features were hidden—and all those cheering thoughts arose, which, whencesoever they came, and by whomsoever inspired, are in times of distress the sure reward of a virtuous and pious life.

Aunt Isobel now came bustling with her usual mirth and vivacity into the room, but instantly changed her mood and her manner when her eyes met those of Agnes. For the first time in her life had she now seen in these eyes something like an expression of misery, which was not diminished by the faint smile that reluctantly passed over their tears. Could it be, she thought, that Michael had been unkind?—and she turned towards him an almost upbraiding look. But Michael kissed the brow of Agnes—and putting her hand into that of her guardian, for that was still her deserved name, he earnestly desired the old lady not

to be disturbed while he told her of a very great and melancholy misfortune, the details of which he had not yet communicated fully even to his wife.

"The stranger who left the house about an hour ago is a respectable person in trade in Edinburgh, and my unhappy brother—poor Abel, instigated, no doubt, and assisted by that villain Mansell, has forged upon him to a very large amount. Abel has got the money—and unless I repay it—Mr Maxwell will do all he can to discover, apprehend, and bring my brother to punishment; that is, to death—yes, to certain irreprievable death. If I make good the loss he has sustained, he will suffer the affair to rest, Abel will escape this time at least, and we may yet rescue him from destruction." The good old lady sighed deeply, and wiped her eyes, but said not a word, and motioned him to proceed. "At my father's death, which God remove to a distant day, you know this property is mine, burthened with a considerable mortgage, and a small annuity to Abel. We have some outstanding debts due to us—and you know the amount of the fortune my beloved Agnes brought me,—all together would no more than repay what Mr Maxwell has lost by my infatuated brother's crime."—"Hush! Hush!" said Agnes, "I think I hear my father's footsteps!" They listened, but it had only been the motion of some bird among the withered leaves. "Yes, my dear Agnes, I feel the meaning of your fears—to know all that we know would break the old man's heart. I did not think it necessary to

consult you what ought to be done—so, trusting to your approval, I told Mr Maxwell that I would make good what he had lost to the last shilling I possessed, or would possess for years to come. But I told him that it would certainly kill my father to be told of Abel's crime, so I have become his debtor to the whole amount he desired, and while I continue to pay him the interest, he will not demand the principal till my father's death. Then Dovenest must be sold, and we must seek out, in our poverty, for another habitation."

Michael rose from his seat at the close of these words, and paced hurriedly up and down the room. "Alas! Mrs Irvine, you will think now—it will be impossible for you not to think it, that Agnes Hay has made an unhappy marriage, and that you brought her up so tenderly, and so wisely, to become miserable at last. And yet, if I could die for my Agnes, if for her sake I could pour out from my heart every drop it contains, if I could purchase her peace through life by the mutilation of my limbs and miserable decease in a lazar-house——"—"Oh! Michael! my husband, what is this I hear? Did you not promise, even now, when you pressed me, as you said with pride, to your bosom, to think nothing of this evil which, since Abel is to be spared, is no evil at all?—No! Michael—it is a blessing—a blessing from that Being who has been most merciful to us all our days. who guarded my orphan head by day and night, and has given me the gift of a humble and contented spirit." And so saying, the beautiful young

wife knelt down, and folded her hands beneath her bosom over the babe that stirred within her, and gave her a foretaste of a mother's joy. "Disturb her not—disturb her not," said her guardian with sobs that might not be controlled. "Not I—not I was it that taught my Agnes—her virtues are from God, and from God came the lore that putteth to shame all worldly wisdom, and maketh her alike fit for the trials of earth, or the reward of heaven."

It was no sudden and transient fit of enthusiasm, but the calm deep movement of piety that kept Agnes in the attitude of prayer. To the meaning of her words, high as it was, her nature was to be for ever true. No exultation felt she in her submissiveness; it was the strong humility of a perfectly resigned heart. The fair sight breathed a corresponding calm over those who in themselves had not perhaps been so comforted, and, on rising from her knees, she was rewarded by the peace on her husband's face, and the kind eyes of her guardian, that looked on her with a sabbath smile. And now the old man's footsteps were evidently heard; every cheek was dried, and every voice composed to cheerfulness, when their father entered the room. He put his staff in the usual corner, and said with animation, "Children, I have had a sharp walk, and it is a fine black frost—let us to our meal—for an east-wind gives a good appetite, and I think that I may yet live to see another Christmas."

The small round table was now covered with its

white cloth, and placed near a blazing root-fire. Agnes, with even more than her usual tenderness, wheeled the old high-backed arm-chair into its place. The old man held up his withered hand, and bowed down his hoary head in a thanksgiving over the frugal repast, and, forgetting or hushing within their hearts all painful thoughts, the family broke their bread in peace, and there were even smiles sent round the board, which, in spite of that sore distress, was blessed of Heaven.

CHAPTER V.

A SNOW-STORM had been blowing throughout the day from all points of the compass, and huge drifts blocked up almost all the roads and paths leading into the valley of the Esk. The family of Dovenest were sitting somewhat late on a January night round a blazing fire, nor did the secret, which their hearts had kept from the old man, painful as it was to think upon, prevent them from enjoying much happiness. Indeed, by their constant care to look cheerful at all times in his presence, they had often made themselves really so, when if left to themselves they could not but have been oppressed with anxiety and grief. Adam Forester had that night spoken frequently of Abel, and lamented that they did not know where he was; for, said he, "I wished to have sent him a New-Year's gift, which he, no doubt, must be sorely in need of—the poor boy has not, I fear, such a comfortable house as we have over his head this wild night—not such a fire as ours to sit by —no—no—Why did he ever leave his father's house?" Soon after these words, the old man fell asleep in his

chair, and nothing more was said by anybody to disturb his slumber. Michael took his book, Agnes sat before him at her work, of a kind most affecting to the heart of a young wife, and Aunt Isobel, whom nobody ever saw idle, was moving about the room with noiseless steps, and getting ready the evening meal by the time the old man should awake, which he was sure to do when the clock gave warning before the hour of eight. Early hours, night and morning, were kept at Dovenest, with some variation, both in winter and summer, and from November till the end of March, nine was the hour of evening prayer.

A loud blow struck the door, and then a man, dressed in red, like an officer of justice, burst into the room. He looked round for a few seconds with a stern smile, and then said, "Aye--aye—you have put Master Abel to bed I trow—but the bird is not flown—he is in the cage—so, good folks, without more ado, let him be produced—I must do my duty," and he laid down a pair of hand-cuffs on the table.

Adam, roused from his sleep by that horrid intrusion, kept his eyes fixed in a ghastly stare upon the pitiless wretch, while his withered cheeks were white as ashes. "Giles Mansell has forged on the Bank of Scotland, and his crony, Abel Forester, your son, old man, is implicated. The brass plates were found in the garret he inhabited not long since—but no need of palaver, hanging is but hanging, so bring him out, or I must have a search in the rookery."

The old man now knew that Abel was a forger, and saw him on the scaffold. He gave no sigh, no groan, no shudder, but, as if a bar of iron had struck him on the temple, or vapour damp suffocated him, his head fell back, and his features grew rigid, as in the grasp of death. Isobel saw the change, and soon bathed his forehead. But Michael questioned the officer, who, unmoved, without circumlocution, and in a few plain and dreadful words, repeated the frightful truth.

The miserable father seemed to hear in his swoon; and raising himself up in his chair, which he was too weak to leave, fastened his eyes once more, as in fascination upon a serpent. "Abel has done many things sore amiss, Mr M'Intyre, for I know your name, Sir, but he is no forger," and the very sound of that fatal word struck on his heart like a knell, while with his eyes still fixed in dreadful doubt on the officer's dark scowling countenance, and, with a forced smile of hope that passed away over his quivering lips and cheeks, he laid back his white head once more, and uttered one long dismal deadly groan of incurable despair.

M'Intyre searched thoroughly the whole house, and then appeared to believe that he had come thither on wrong information. He sat down, laid his loaded pistols on the table, and helped himself to food. Meanwhile Michael had taken his father in his arms, and carrying him into his own room, laid him on his bed. He tried to comfort him in his agony, but his father, although he looked on him, did not seem

to hear or to understand his words. Agnes came and sat down at the bed-side, holding the old man's head between her hands,—and Michael returned to the room he had left. M'Intyre was eating greedily, and demanded liquor, which was given. There the fiend sat with his shaggy eye-brows, coarse features, and sallow complexion, dead to all human misery. The thief-taker had once been a soldier, and had seen much of honourable and dishonourable death. For twenty years, —for the wretch's coarse hair was grizzled,—it had been his business to prowl about prisons,—to lock cells upon guilt and despair,—to sit cold as ice beside quaking caitiffs at the Bar,—and to do hideous work about scaffolds on days of execution. Even he had an idea of duty—inexorable with a warrant—and not to be bribed by the criminal on whom he had set his fangs—gruff and grim in his integrity that was proof against the silver and gold of those who had been driven to wickedness by want and famine.

" Nae doubt it is hard on your father—Sir—but in time he'll get ower it like mysel. It's nae secret— a' Scotland kens it—how my ain son, Donald Dhu, rubbed shouthers with the gallows. He had gotten up to be sergeant in the Forty-Second—the Auld Black-Watch—but a halbert wouldna content my gentleman, he wad fain be an ensign, so he forges a bill for four hunder poun'—but his hawse wasna made for hemp, aff gaed Donald across the seas, and was shot through the heart by a black Nigger in the West Indies. Anither

stoup o' whisky, Sir, gin ye please. It's a bitter night, eneuch to tirr a taed, and I hae been up to the oxters in snaw-pits fifty times between this and Loanhead."

Michael, who had had time to reflect on the charge against Abel, began to recover his spirits, and to believe that this might be a mistake—at all events, he had no reason to think that his brother was now in Scotland—and in this belief he could bear more patiently the presence of the loquacious man of blood. "Weel—weel—man—I'm no sorry that this ne'er-do-weel brither o' yours is no here the nicht. But dinna think that he'll no be gruppit during this verra moon. Think ye he'll escape a' the thief-takers between the Land's End and John o' Groats? We're a strong squad. And then there's no a clachan, nor a town, nor a road-side change-house, that has nae a hue-and-cry description o' him by this time—liker than ony painted picture. There they are stuck up on every smiddy-door—every cross-stane—every gabel-end—every kirk-yett. A fox may as weel think o' running in the day-time thro' amang houses, and alang the king's high-road, without being worried by a thousand curs. The Hue-and-Cry will gang down into the verra coal-pits, and the chimley-soopers will ken him war he to tak a brush owre his shouther, and blacken his face like the deil himsel'. But here's to you—Sir—this is prime spirit.—I'se warrant it's smuggled."

Finding that Michael did not join in the conversation, the officer lighted his pipe—and sat mute and

surly, with his huge hand close upon his pistols—till the clock struck twelve, when, with an oath, he started to his feet, and, growling out that he must be at the jail by two o'clock, pocketed his weapons, and faced the storm, still raging furiously, in the starless night. Michael listened at the door, and heard him plunging through the wreathes away down the Glen.

Michael's heart, in some degree, revived on the removal of that loathsome reptile, or beast of prey, and just as he was about to go into his father's room, the old man, supported by Agnes and Isobel, came feebly forwards, and requested to be placed in his chair. "Oh! Abel, Abel! why hast thou done this thing? And is there indeed no pity for thee among thy fellow-creatures?—No, they know not how to pardon each other's sins. But we have not had family worship yet, and it must be done before I take to my bed; for from that bed shall I never be lifted again, till you Michael walk at my feet, and lay your father in the only place of rest on this cruel earth." But Michael was not able to read the chapter, so Agnes, stronger than them all in this trial, took the Bible, and read what her father had marked some hours before, with a voice that faltered less and less at every verse, and, at the close, was almost steady as it had been in the morning worship.

A pane in the window that moved on a hinge was stirred, and a well-known whisper said,—"Brother—brother!" The old feeble man started like a youth to

his feet at the sound of Abel's voice. The door was unlocked, and there in the midst of them, all drenched with sleet and snow, stood the poor hunted felon. "Kiss me—kiss me, Abel—for I am sick—sick at heart," and the miserable man laid his icy cheek close to that of his father. Instinctively he supported him to his chair, and knelt down, leaning his head upon his father's knees. "Will not that fearful fiend return against us?" said the old man, looking wildly towards the door—and Michael stood in his giant strength before his father and his brother, resolved that not a hair of Abel's head should be touched till he himself was killed. But the officer had obeyed his instructions, and was now miles on his road to Edinburgh.

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CHAPTER VI.

HAD Adam Forester been even a stern and austere father, instead of one most indulgent and forgiving, the pitiable condition of his son must have softened all judgment of his undutiful transgressions. His guilt had been great, but so had already been its punishment. He had found himself inextricably involved in many dishonest and dangerous practices by Mansell, whose sister he had privately married. That unprincipled person had urged him to the commission of all those acts which had made him amenable to the criminal law, and had indeed so practised upon his easy and credulous nature, as to lead his hand into guilt without even a clear knowledge in his mind that he was perpetrating any crime. Mansell, a man of education and ingenuity, had been an engraver, and had applied his knowledge of that art to the worst purposes. Abel had been made a convenient tool of by his abandoned brother-in-law, and at last found that he had brought himself close to the very edge of destruction. He scarcely knew the exact extent of his own guilt. But

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His extreme suffering had so worn out both soul and body, that Abel, on his arrival at Dovenest, was at first almost insensible to every thing he saw or heard. His very remorse was lost in pain, sickness, and exhaustion; and while his old grey-headed father had embraced him once more, he scarcely knew that he was in the old man's arms. "Let me lie down—father—for I am dead with weariness, cold, hunger, and want of sleep." Adam Forester's strength had seemed miraculously restored on sight of his son. On his shoulders, rather than on Michael's, had the prodigal leaned as he tottered to his bed—at that bed-side his father heard his hurried confession; nor would the old man go to his own rest till Agnes beseeched him with those soft dewy eyes, whose gracious power he could never oppose, and promised to call him up before day-light, with that low and plaintive voice which had never yet asked and been refused, and never would so do until his dying day.

But long before day-light there was Adam Forester sitting by his Abel's bed-side. With his own hands had he lighted a fire in the room, and was preparing some food for him when Agnes appeared. A few hours

warm sleep had much restored the miserable man; and wholly possessed with the feeling of being once more at home—once more a dweller in Dovenest, Abel almost forgot that he was a hunted felon, and that in an hour he might be dragged from his bed and flung manacled into a dungeon. All the evil of these two last years, whether it were sin or sorrow, guilt or remorse, was banished from his memory—himself of that distracted time had perished away—and he was the innocent Abel of other days, when he had little more to upbraid himself with but a few faults and follies, forgiven as soon as known, and never remembered against him beyond the first evening-prayer. Then would he all at once remember what he was now—and as the horrible future appalled him, he wished that the past might be here peacefully expiated, and his head never more lifted up from that pillow.

Within the last few hours some of the strongest of all human passions had with severe force struck the heart of old Adam Forester, and passions, too, opposite to each other as mid-day and mid-night. These sudden shocks had for the time communicated, as it were, a preternatural strength to their victim. But when the final excitation subsided, it left him weak as a reed. He was sensible, before others observed it, that a palsy had crept over him, that his powers of speech were benumbed, and that this must be the finger of death. The change was soon visible to all but Abel; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, who had the most nice

knowledge of all his looks, gestures, words, and motions, certainly knew that he was fatally stricken. There was no painful distortion to distress their hearts—his speech was not greatly changed; but a mortal weakness overspread face and figure, and there was an expression in his eyes that told the lids would in a few hours be closed. "I am dying—children—let me have all your prayers." Abel had again fallen asleep, and heard not his father's voice.

There was no weeping or lamentation at that death-bed. As the tide of life kept ebbing away, the old man seemed anxious and more anxious about Abel. But his anxiety although heavier seemed less painful, and to be nearly akin to hope and trust. They who surrounded him knew well what was meant by each faint single word, they also knew all he wished to hear, and as his dim eyes looked towards them, which of them he expected to speak. "If my Abel has wronged any one, sell this patrimony, Michael, and purchase him life."

Michael had kept one secret from his father, for he knew that, independently of other considerations, old men cannot bear, without severe pain, the thoughts of the property their industry has painfully purchased departing into a stranger's hands after their death; and Adam Forester was not altogether without this failing incident to old age. But now Michael saw that he could give him strong comfort. "Father, fear not for Abel's life. Of this last crime of his associate he has said that

he is wholly innocent, and however suspicious circumstances may be against him, they will all be explained should he ever be brought to trial. The innocent will not suffer. Other wrong things has Abel done—but some months ago I settled the whole with his accuser, and even with this, my patrimony, have I already purchased safety to his life. Not a hair of Abel's head shall be hurt, father—no not a hair of his head."

"Then can I die happy," said the old man, and these were his last words. Agnes leaned down her cheek close to his, and was about to smooth his pillow—but she heard no breath, and said calmly to Michael, "Our father is dead."

CHAPTER VII.

In a few weeks it was known throughout the neighbourhood, that both Dovenest and Sprinkeld were to be sold. Some people, who pretended to be in the secret, said, that Michael's young wife longed for a town-life, and had given him no peace until he had agreed to remove into Edinburgh. Others looked grave and shook their heads, saying, they had never thought Adam Forester a rich man—that heavy mortgages were on his small property, and that, no doubt, Abel had cost his fond and foolish father much money, the old man having, very reprehensibly, encouraged him in all his extravagance. None knew the real state of the case; although, in a short time, Michael let it be generally understood, that he was able indeed to pay all his debts, but, after that was done, that he should be but a poor man. Coarse and idle rumours died away in less than one little month, and it was felt by every fire-side in the glen, that, when the Foresters left it, it would lose the best family it had contained within the oldest memory. There was no pity felt for them, for they all

ed with its usual untroubled sweetness on the prospect of poverty or even want, he could not but feel the utter worthlessness of all other possessions; while the hopeful light of her eyes beaming fondly upon him forced him to believe that his brother would escape, and that the worst evil he had feared need no more haunt his imagination. Each tear as it fell at times down her cheek upon his—each almost repressed sigh—each whisper of comfort when no word was syllabled, and each consoling sentence of wisest words, when her emotion permitted utterance to her calm voice, restored him more and more nearly to his usual tranquillity. A sort of haze hung over the evil that had befallen—its most hideous features were hidden—and all those cheering thoughts arose, which, whencesoever they came, and by whomsoever inspired, are in times of distress the sure reward of a virtuous and pious life.

Aunt Isobel now came bustling with her usual mirth and vivacity into the room, but instantly changed her mood and her manner when her eyes met those of Agnes. For the first time in her life had she now seen in these eyes something like an expression of misery, which was not diminished by the faint smile that reluctantly passed over their tears. Could it be, she thought, that Michael had been unkind?—and she turned towards him an almost upbraiding look. But Michael kissed the brow of Agnes—and putting her hand into that of her guardian, for that was still her deserved name, he earnestly desired the old lady not

to be disturbed while he told her of a very great and melancholy misfortune, the details of which he had not yet communicated fully even to his wife.

"The stranger who left the house about an hour ago is a respectable person in trade in Edinburgh, and my unhappy brother—poor Abel, instigated, no doubt, and assisted by that villain Mansell, has forged upon him to a very large amount. Abel has got the money —and unless I repay it—Mr Maxwell will do all he can to discover, apprehend, and bring my brother to punishment; that is, to death—yes, to certain irreprievable death. If I make good the loss he has sustained, he will suffer the affair to rest, Abel will escape this time at least, and we may yet rescue him from destruction." The good old lady sighed deeply, and wiped her eyes, but said not a word, and motioned him to proceed. "At my father's death, which God remove to a distant day, you know this property is mine, burthened with a considerable mortgage, and a small annuity to Abel. We have some outstanding debts due to us —and you know the amount of the fortune my beloved Agnes brought me,—all together would no more than repay what Mr Maxwell has lost by my infatuated brother's crime."—"Hush! Hush!" said Agnes, "I think I hear my father's footsteps!" They listened, but it had only been the motion of some bird among the withered leaves. "Yes, my dear Agnes, I feel the meaning of your fears—to know all that we know would break the old man's heart. I did not think it necessary to

consult you what ought to be done—so, trusting to your approval, I told Mr Maxwell that I would make good what he had lost to the last shilling I possessed, or would possess for years to come. But I told him that it would certainly kill my father to be told of Abel's crime, so I have become his debtor to the whole amount he desired, and while I continue to pay him the interest, he will not demand the principal till my father's death. Then Dovenest must be sold, and we must seek out, in our poverty, for another habitation."

Michael rose from his seat at the close of these words, and paced hurriedly up and down the room. "Alas! Mrs Irvine, you will think now—it will be impossible for you not to think it, that Agnes Hay has made an unhappy marriage, and that you brought her up so tenderly, and so wisely, to become miserable at last. And yet, if I could die for my Agnes, if for her sake I could pour out from my heart every drop it contains, if I could purchase her peace through life by the mutilation of my limbs and miserable decease in a lazar-house——"—"Oh! Michael! my husband, what is this I hear? Did you not promise, even now, when you pressed me, as you said with pride, to your bosom, to think nothing of this evil which, since Abel is to be spared, is no evil at all?—No! Michael—it is a blessing—a blessing from that Being who has been most merciful to us all our days, who guarded my orphan head by day and night, and has given me the gift of a humble and contented spirit." And, so saying, the beautiful young

wife knelt down, and folded her hands beneath her bosom over the babe that stirred within her, and gave her a foretaste of a mother's joy. "Disturb her not—disturb her not," said her guardian with sobs that might not be controlled. "Not I—not I was it that taught my Agnes—her virtues are from God, and from God came the lore that putteth to shame all worldly wisdom, and maketh her alike fit for the trials of earth, or the reward of heaven."

It was no sudden and transient fit of enthusiasm, but the calm deep movement of piety that kept Agnes in the attitude of prayer. To the meaning of her words, high as it was, her nature was to be for ever true. No exultation felt she in her submissiveness; it was the strong humility of a perfectly resigned heart. The fair sight breathed a corresponding calm over those who in themselves had not perhaps been so comforted, and, on rising from her knees, she was rewarded by the peace on her husband's face, and the kind eyes of her guardian, that looked on her with a sabbath smile. And now the old man's footsteps were evidently heard; every cheek was dried, and every voice composed to cheerfulness, when their father entered the room. He put his staff in the usual corner, and said with animation, "Children, I have had a sharp walk, and it is a fine black frost—let us to our meal—for an east-wind gives a good appetite, and I think that I may yet live to see another Christmas."

The small round table was now covered with its

white cloth, and placed near a blazing root-fire. Agnes, with even more than her usual tenderness, wheeled the old high-backed arm-chair into its place. The old man held up his withered hand, and bowed down his hoary head in a thanksgiving over the frugal repast, and, forgetting or hushing within their hearts all painful thoughts, the family broke their bread in peace, and there were even smiles sent round the board, which, in spite of that sore distress, was blessed of Heaven.

CHAPTER V.



A SNOW-STORM had been blowing throughout the day from all points of the compass, and huge drifts blocked up almost all the roads and paths leading into the valley of the Esk. The family of Dovenest were sitting somewhat late on a January night round a blazing fire, nor did the secret, which their hearts had kept from the old man, painful as it was to think upon, prevent them from enjoying much happiness. Indeed, by their constant care to look cheerful at all times in his presence, they had often made themselves really so, when if left to themselves they could not but have been oppressed with anxiety and grief. Adam Forester had that night spoken frequently of Abel, and lamented that they did not know where he was; for, said he, "I wished to have sent him a New-Year's gift, which he, no doubt, must be sorely in need of—the poor boy has not, I fear, such a comfortable house as we have over his head this wild night—not such a fire as ours to sit by —no—no—Why did he ever leave his father's house?" Soon after these words, the old man fell asleep in his

chair, and nothing more was said by anybody to disturb his slumber. Michael took his book, Agnes sat before him at her work, of a kind most affecting to the heart of a young wife, and Aunt Isobel, whom nobody ever saw idle, was moving about the room with noiseless steps, and getting ready the evening meal by the time the old man should awake, which he was sure to do when the clock gave warning before the hour of eight. Early hours, night and morning, were kept at Dovenest, with some variation, both in winter and summer, and from November till the end of March, nine was the hour of evening prayer.

A loud blow struck the door, and then a man, dressed in red, like an officer of justice, burst into the room. He looked round for a few seconds with a stern smile, and then said, "Aye--aye—you have put Master Abel to bed I trow—but the bird is not flown—he is in the cage—so, good folks, without more ado, let him be produced—I must do my duty," and he laid down a pair of hand-cuffs on the table.

Adam, roused from his sleep by that horrid intrusion, kept his eyes fixed in a ghastly stare upon the pitiless wretch, while his withered cheeks were white as ashes. "Giles Mansell has forged on the Bank of Scotland, and his crony, Abel Forester, your son, old man, is implicated. The brass plates were found in the garret he inhabited not long since—but no need of palaver, hanging is but hanging, so bring him out, or I must have a search in the rookery."

The old man now knew that Abel was a forger, and saw him on the scaffold. He gave no sigh, no groan, no shudder, but, as if a bar of iron had struck him on the temple, or vapour damp suffocated him, his head fell back, and his features grew rigid, as in the grasp of death. Isobel saw the change, and soon bathed his forehead. But Michael questioned the officer, who, unmoved, without circumlocution, and in a few plain and dreadful words, repeated the frightful truth.

The miserable father seemed to hear in his swoon; and raising himself up in his chair, which he was too weak to leave, fastened his eyes once more, as in fascination upon a serpent. "Abel has done many things sore amiss, Mr M'Intyre, for I know your name, Sir, but he is no forger," and the very sound of that fatal word struck on his heart like a knell, while with his eyes still fixed in dreadful doubt on the officer's dark scowling countenance, and, with a forced smile of hope that passed away over his quivering lips and cheeks, he laid back his white head once more, and uttered one long dismal deadly groan of incurable despair.

M'Intyre searched thoroughly the whole house, and then appeared to believe that he had come thither on wrong information. He sat down, laid his loaded pistols on the table, and helped himself to food. Meanwhile Michael had taken his father in his arms, and carrying him into his own room, laid him on his bed. He tried to comfort him in his agony, but his father, although he looked on him, did not seem

to hear or to understand his words. Agnes came and sat down at the bed-side, holding the old man's head between her hands,—and Michael returned to the room he had left. M'Intyre was eating greedily, and demanded liquor, which was given. There the fiend sat with his shaggy eye-brows, coarse features, and sallow complexion, dead to all human misery. The thief-taker had once been a soldier, and had seen much of honourable and dishonourable death. For twenty years, —for the wretch's coarse hair was grizzled,—it had been his business to prowl about prisons,—to lock cells upon guilt and despair,—to sit cold as ice beside quaking caitiffs at the Bar,—and to do hideous work about scaffolds on days of execution. Even he had an idea of duty—inexorable with a warrant—and not to be bribed by the criminal on whom he had set his fangs—gruff and grim in his integrity that was proof against the silver and gold of those who had been driven to wickedness by want and famine.

"Nae doubt it is hard on your father—Sir—but in time he'll get ower it like mysel. It's nae secret—a' Scotland kens it—how my ain son, Donald Dhu, rubbed shouthers with the gallows. He had gotten up to be sergeant in the Forty-Second—the Auld Black-Watch—but a halbert wouldna content my gentleman, he wad fain be an ensign, so he forges a bill for four hunder poun'—but his hawse wasna made for hemp, aff gaed Donald across the seas, and was shot through the heart by a black Nigger in the West Indies. Anither

stoup o' whisky, Sir, gin ye please. It's a bitter night, eneuch to tirr a taed, and I hae been up to the oxters in snaw-pits fifty times between this and Loanhead."

Michael, who had had time to reflect on the charge against Abel, began to recover his spirits, and to believe that this might be a mistake—at all events, he had no reason to think that his brother was now in Scotland—and in this belief he could bear more patiently the presence of the loquacious man of blood. "Weel—weel—man—I'm no sorry that this ne'er-do-weel brither o' yours is no here the nicht. But dinna think that he'll no be gruppit during this verra moon. Think ye he'll escape a' the thief-takers between the Land's End and John o' Groats? We're a strong squad. And then there's no a clachan, nor a town, nor a road-side change-house, that has nae a hue-and-cry description o' him by this time—liker than ony painted picture. There they are stuck up on every smiddy-door—every cross-stane—every gabel-end—every kirk-yett. A fox may as weel think o' running in the day-time thro' amang houses, and alang the king's high-road, without being worried by a thousand curs. The Hue-and-Cry will gang down into the verra coal-pits, and the chimley-soopers will ken him war he to tak a brush owre his shouther, and blacken his face like the deil himsel'. But here's to you—Sir—this is prime spirit.—I'se warrant it's smuggled."

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Abel had at last been driven to such extremities in his endeavours to conceal himself, that for a week he had remained day and night in one of the old tombs of the Grey-Friars Church-yard. Now and then he had come out like a ghost from that dreadful asylum, and purchased something to keep him alive. The weather had been intensely cold, and the poor criminal had been sometimes nearly frozen to death. But the love of life, that strong passion, had supported his heart in the very frostiest famine, and the agitation of an unceasing anxiety had made his blood to circulate, when otherwise it would have been congealed through his veins in that open vault, whose only door had sometimes been a drift of snow. In the squalor of his wretchedness he had at last been afraid to go into any shop to purchase a loaf to devour in his gnawing hunger—eyes looked at him suspiciously, he thought, and people whispered to each other—so that, unable longer to endure that direful imprisonment, he had issued forth in spite of fear, and in defiance of all emergencies had found his way in that snow-storm to the house of his

father. Some one had, perhaps, known his countenance, and informed the police that he had been seen in the city; or M'Intyre's visit to Dovenest might have been one of those accidental coincidences, that often bring guilt to detection, and at all times hang over the workers of iniquity, making on a sudden the most safe and secret place dangerous as the lion's den.

His extreme suffering had so worn out both soul and body, that Abel, on his arrival at Dovenest, was at first almost insensible to every thing he saw or heard. His very remorse was lost in pain, sickness, and exhaustion; and while his old grey-headed father had embraced him once more, he scarcely knew that he was in the old man's arms. "Let me lie down—father—for I am dead with weariness, cold, hunger, and want of sleep." Adam Forester's strength had seemed miraculously restored on sight of his son. On his shoulders, rather than on Michael's, had the prodigal leaned as he tottered to his bed—at that bed-side his father heard his hurried confession; nor would the old man go to his own rest till Agnes beseeched him with those soft dewy eyes, whose gracious power he could never oppose, and promised to call him up before day-light, with that low and plaintive voice which had never yet asked and been refused, and never would so do until his dying day.

But long before day-light there was Adam Forester sitting by his Abel's bed-side. With his own hands had he lighted a fire in the room, and was preparing some food for him when Agnes appeared. A few hours

warm sleep had much restored the miserable man; and wholly possessed with the feeling of being once more at home—once more a dweller in Dovenest, Abel almost forgot that he was a hunted felon, and that in an hour he might be dragged from his bed and flung manacled into a dungeon. All the evil of these two last years, whether it were sin or sorrow, guilt or remorse, was banished from his memory—himself of that distracted time had perished away—and he was the innocent Abel of other days, when he had little more to upbraid himself with but a few faults and follies, forgiven as soon as known, and never remembered against him beyond the first evening-prayer. Then would he all at once remember what he was now—and as the horrible future appalled him, he wished that the past might be here peacefully expiated, and his head never more lifted up from that pillow.

Within the last few hours some of the strongest of all human passions had with severe force struck the heart of old Adam Forester, and passions, too, opposite to each other as mid-day and mid-night. These sudden shocks had for the time communicated, as it were, a preternatural strength to their victim. But when the final excitation subsided, it left him weak as a reed. He was sensible, before others observed it, that a palsy had crept over him, that his powers of speech were benumbed, and that this must be the finger of death. The change was soon visible to all but Abel; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, who had the most nice

knowledge of all his looks, gestures, words, and motions, certainly knew that he was fatally stricken. There was no painful distortion to distress their hearts—his speech was not greatly changed; but a mortal weakness overspread face and figure, and there was an expression in his eyes that told the lids would in a few hours be closed. "I am dying—children—let me have all your prayers." Abel had again fallen asleep, and heard not his father's voice.

There was no weeping or lamentation at that death-bed. As the tide of life kept ebbing away, the old man seemed anxious and more anxious about Abel. But his anxiety although heavier seemed less painful, and to be nearly akin to hope and trust. They who surrounded him knew well what was meant by each faint single word, they also knew all he wished to hear, and as his dim eyes looked towards them, which of them he expected to speak. "If my Abel has wronged any one, sell this patrimony, Michael, and purchase his life."

Michael had kept one secret from his father, for he knew that, independently of other considerations, old men cannot bear, without severe pain, the thoughts of the property their industry has painfully purchased departing into a stranger's hands after their death; and Adam Forester was not altogether without this failing incident to old age. But now Michael saw that he could give him strong comfort. "Father, fear not for Abel's life. Of this last crime of his associate he has said that

he is wholly innocent, and however suspicious circumstances may be against him, they will all be explained should he ever be brought to trial. The innocent will not suffer. Other wrong things has Abel done—but some months ago I settled the whole with his accuser, and even with this, my patrimony, have I already purchased safety to his life. Not a hair of Abel's head shall be hurt, father—no not a hair of his head."

"Then can I die happy," said the old man, and these were his last words. Agnes leaned down her cheek close to his, and was about to smooth his pillow—but she heard no breath, and said calmly to Michael, "Our father is dead."

CHAPTER VII.

In a few weeks it was known throughout the neighbourhood, that both Dovenest and Sprinkeld were to be sold. Some people, who pretended to be in the secret, said, that Michael's young wife longed for a town-life, and had given him no peace until he had agreed to remove into Edinburgh. Others looked grave and shook their heads, saying, they had never thought Adam Forester a rich man—that heavy mortgages were on his small property, and that, no doubt, Abel had cost his fond and foolish father much money, the old man having, very reprehensibly, encouraged him in all his extravagance. None knew the real state of the case; although, in a short time, Michael let it be generally understood, that he was able indeed to pay all his debts, but, after that was done, that he should be but a poor man. Coarse and idle rumours died away in less than one little month, and it was felt by every fire-side in the glen, that, when the Foresters left it, it would lose the best family it had contained within the oldest memory. There was no pity felt, for them, for they all

seemed composed and cheerful shortly after the funeral. Indeed, there are persons, and the Foresters were of that number, who, even in severest trials, are objects of a higher feeling than pity, and appear, in the elevation of misfortune, worthier our envy than our compassion. Towards them all impertinent curiosity is at once quelled by the simple dignity of their demeanour—their condition, whatever it may be, must not be questioned, and, although we remain ignorant of their real circumstances, we take the propriety of all their conduct on trust, and follow them in all their unrepining changes with our silent and approving sympathy.

Nor was there now any unhappiness very hard to be endured within the walls of Dovenest. Abel had remained in his concealment, till he thought he might venture to attempt his nightly escape over the hill country into the North of England. His case was desperate, and after many contrite and remorseful confessions, and receiving his brother's entire forgiveness, he went his way, promising to let them hear something of him, if he eluded detection, as soon as prudence would permit. The silence of all rumours concerning him was the best comfort that could be offered to all their hearts; and they were willing to cherish the belief that he had effected his escape beyond seas. That belief was enough. What although they were about to be what is called poor? By that poverty they had probably purchased Abel's life, at a time when it was forfeited, and he himself might have been seized. And

what peace could there ever have been at Dovenest again, if for its sake Abel had been destroyed? Yet although soon to leave that beloved place, they did not seek violently to dissever from it their strong affections. They would enjoy it to the last; every day they had yet to remain within its quiet bounds, they filled up from morning to night with endearing thoughts of its beauty—every little nook was visited and revisited with an unrestrained pleasure gently mingled with an unpainful regret,—every tree that hung its shadow over the hawthorn-hedge upon their own river, they regarded more fondly now that their last spring was adorning its familiar branches—and as they stood beside the dial, they prayed that the hours might throw over it their lingering shadows, that the day of their departure, though fixed, might be as remote as possible, and their last two months extended in the multitude of their thoughts within them into the length of a mournful but not unhappy year. To Michael, the prospect of leaving for ever the house in which he had been born, was, perhaps, less disturbing at any time, than it was to Agnes to know that the scene of her bridal happiness was soon to pass away from her like a dream. Seeing them perfectly resigned, Aunt Isobel lost nothing of her habitual vivacity, and her constant cheerfulness often insinuated itself by an agreeable contagion into their spirits, when perhaps they were disposed to despond, and might have yielded to the pressure of natural disappointment and distress. And

ere long there was a new inmate within the peaceful dwelling—for a child was born, and Michael and Agnes being now parents, not one single shadow of sorrow could abide round its cradle. Agnes felt it at her bosom—Michael saw its mother smile—and all mere worldly prosperity was under the power of that sacred instinct utterly forgotten. Richer were they than tongue could tell, or heart could conceive; and the Sabbath-day, on which the infant Lucy was baptized, was the most serenely and perfectly blest day of all their lives, scarcely excepting that on which they had been married.

Michael Forester had fixed upon a plan of life, and had already prepared to carry it into execution. The only master he had ever known was his own father, and that had been always a pleasant servitude. Independent he would still be; and in so resolving, he felt that he was influenced by an allowable—an honourable pride. A strong man in the meridian of life, well educated and not unconscious of his abilities, what had he to fear either for himself or those he loved? Nay, a new spring of happiness seemed to be flowing within his heart, now that a demand was made for exertions that, but for this misfortune, would have been unnecessary: and he looked with a steady and bold eye into futurity. His life at Dovenest, industrious as it had been, almost appeared to him now, in the elation of his hopeful mind, to have been a life of indolence. "I will build another house—I will cultivate other fields—I will be-

come a sitter in another kirk—I will form other connections—not to the forgetfulness of any one thing, place or person now dear to me—no—no,—never shall they cease from my grateful remembrance—but to all those I will add other enjoyments, and my Agnes, if so it pleaseth Heaven, my beautiful Agnes shall be yet happier than ever."

There was a pastoral Farm in the Parish of Holy-lee, called Bracken-Braes, which had been attached to one still larger several years ago, but which was again to be let by itself, owing to the mismanagement and failure of the tenant. The dwelling-house had been suffered to go almost entirely into decay; but the agent of the rich proprietor to whom a large district of the country belonged, at once offered to repair or rebuild it, and Michael, having easily found sureties, took the Farm. Aunt Isobel, out of her jointure as a minister's widow, had, during upwards of thirty years, saved three hundred pounds; and Michael knew what was his duty too well to refuse employing that sum in the way that was best for the happiness of the household. The cheerful old lady laughed on confessing her unknown riches, but tears of thankfulness were, at the same time, in her eyes, when she knew what a blessing was now in her little store. So, while Agnes was happy with her infant Lucy at Dovenest, Michael frequently visited Bracken-Braes, which was to be ready for them on the twenty-fifth of May, when there would be a joyful flitting—aye joyful, even although it was

to be from Dovenest—although that gate which he had had so often unlatched was to be closed behind him for the rest of his life.

The house of Bracken-Braes, at the end of February, was in ruins. The mossy stone-wall, round what had once been a garden, was in many places fallen down, and here and there the wild sweet-briars seemed to hold it together by their roots and tendrils. In that defaced garden nothing was to be seen but a few gooseberry-bushes in their old age almost as tall and wide as lilacs. A sheltered bourtree, and a mountain-ash dwarfed by the browzing cattle, stood at one gable end which was yet entire, and a noble Plane overshadowed the deserted domicile. The hill-side behind, from which the place took its name, was sprinkled with brackens interspersed with a few hazels, while here and there a holly with its burnished green brightened the pasture. The other low hills near at hand were smooth and bare, but in the distance was a range of heathery mountains. Several streams, or rather runlets, rose imperceptibly round about, in droughty weather no doubt dried up, but now with the melted snow clear as diamonds, while a well even still clearer, and never known to have been dry, green with water-cresses, and resplendent with various vegetable lustre, had lain there for a good many years undisturbed by bowl or pitcher, and stirred only by the shaggy hill-ponies, or sportsman lying down to quench his thirst when in pursuit of the solitary plover.

Poets are fond of building fairy cottages in an oasis in the desert—or perhaps beneath the lake-waves—or in groves of air at the rising or setting of golden suns. But here, all transformation, sudden and beautiful as it was, was the work of homely human skill, labouring on the homeliest materials. A small quarry of blue slate-stone, unworked since from it had been built the parish-kirk, nearly a century ago, was cleared of brackens, briars, and fox-gloves, to the disturbance of nothing but the little shy wren and the old grey hare—and in a week the sledges had laid down beside the ruined walls wherewithal to rebuild up anew their ancient proportions. Michael's own hands dug the foundations, and shaped them into lines even of picturesque beauty, obeying only the character of the ground, and its small jutting angles. The merry masons soon ran up the walls. Several oaks that had been dug up from a neighbouring moss, almost as fresh as when they had sunk in it, furnished the lintels and the humble roof-tree,—a few carts of wheat-straw from the sunny and fertile fields of Stowe were enough to form a thick regular thatch-roof impervious to the thawing snows, or the deluging hill-rains; the trowels covered the low front and gable-ends with a cheerful gleam of whiteness that perhaps the painter might have condemned, but which was to smile on the narrow glen with perpetual sunshine—and there was the Homestead of Bracken-Braes, seen from foundation-stone to chimney top, before the second moon had en-

tirely withdrawn her midnight-light from the glittering stream of Heriot-Water.

The sun, on the twenty-fifth of May, rose with so joyful a lustre upon Dovenest, that all its inmates felt it would be worse than vain to be very sorrowful. But even before that joyful lustre had glinted upon the woods of Dryden, Hawthornden, and Roslin, all its inmates had been moving about in the grey and uncertain dawn. They had not been forced to sell their furniture, nor to undergo the mean miseries of a sale. It was soon dispatched towards Bracken-Braes—their last meal was taken in Dovenest—and if some tears were shed as they were going down the glen, all eyes were nearly clear before they reached Lasswade. It was rather like a party of pleasure seeking a rural holiday, than a family leaving an old home.

"Aye, yonder is our new dwelling-place!" exclaimed Aunt Isobel, as, during one of the cool hours before evening, the little cavalcade turned round a green mound that had hidden Bracken-Braes—"Look yonder, my jewel—will not your cradle rock pleasantly yonder like a bit nest on the shady bough?" and she raised up the baby in her arms, that certainly smiled an answer to her cheerful nurse. In a few minutes Michael took Agnes in his arms, and welcomed her with a kiss to their new habitation; and there she stood more beautiful and beloved than even on that afternoon when they first told to each other their pure affection. To Agnes the scene around her was far more than enchantment. Her

husband had spoken of the place in measured praise, fearing it might not please after Dovenest. But it was so different from that spot, in its simple pastoral beauty, that Agnes loved it at once, without any comparisons, for its own sake. In silent joy she walked with her husband—Aunt Isobel behind them cherishing and singing to the infant—up the avenue that winded round a knoll to the front of the cottage. There, on each side of the sloping banks, were the very self-same rose-trees that had flourished so richly at Dovenest—many of the very self-same flowers—and a few shrubs that had been especial favourites. "They are taking kindly to the soil already," said Michael. "But here—here"—cried Aunt Isobel—"here is the prettiest flower of them all—my own little Lucy Forester, the Primrose of Bracken-Braes!"

For a couple of hours Aunt Isobel was quite in her element arranging every thing within doors and without—insisting all the time, that Agnes should not fatigue herself, but remain with her Lucy on the seat beneath the Plane-Tree. The parlour was soon furnished, if not with the same orderly neatness which it received next day, very passably at least, considering all the hurry and confusion,—and it was needful it should be so, for a party of visitors were already at the gate.

The clergyman of the parish, and his sober-suited sister, Mr and Miss Kennedy, and with them several of the most respectable neighbours, (among others, Peter Tait, the formal and pragmatical schoolmaster,) had

come, by Michael's appointment, to give a welcome to their new parishioners at Bracken-Braes. Agnes and Aunt Isobel, each in her own pleasant way, received their unexpected guests, who had not come unprovided, and a tea-party was soon laughing and talking in the parlour. By and bye, the twilight softly darkened their faces, and the night-hawk was heard without, whirring at intervals his monotonous song, now close at hand, and now from the other side of the glen. The kind visitors, with a warmth like that of ancient friendship, said farewell beneath the still shadow of the Plane; and the family, in another hour, had all thankfully gone to rest in their new dwelling.

CHAPTER VIII.

Six quiet and laborious years, every week and month of which had, no doubt, contained its own little interesting incidents, had brought the farm of Bracken-Braes to the perfection of pastoral beauty. Many a cold marsh, with its long unprofitable rushes, had been converted into the hard firm sod, on which the sheep lay with their lambs on the daisied herbage. Unseen turf-fences went winding along the foot of every eminence, and even round and round the lower hills, subdividing the whole farm into picturesque enclosures. Small spots of rye and barley were visible among the heather; the turnip field showed its richer verdure beside the stony slope of the uplands—and down in the haughs, on the water-side, bloomed the white and purple clover, protected by thick thorn-hedges from the cattle browzing on the old lea adjacent to the Homestead. That Homestead looked now almost like a building of other years. The thatch had received its weather-stains, the most beautiful of colouring; but little of the walls below the eaves could be discerned through

the roses, that clustered more thickly round the large vine-like leaves of the Virgin's Bower; the very shrubberies now cast their shadows, and the old Plane-Tree itself, that seemed to have reached its growth a quarter of a century before, had extended its branches beyond the roof, and darkened the parlour-twilight. Every bare nook about the place was now overgrown; every mark of the labour that had created cottage, garden, and avenue was hidden; all the little stone walls were covered with moss and wild creepers; the lanes leading away to neighbours' house, sheep-fold, shealing or peat-moss, were adorned with furze and hawthorns; and the character of the whole, small territory was that of completed cultivation, denoting comfort and independence.

Not only had Michael Forester prospered in his worldly circumstances, and gained the esteem of the whole parish, but, during those six years, there had never been an hour of much anxiety at his fireside. Agnes Hay, for he always called his wife by her own sweet name, had been to him all that he desired. Agnes certainly was not what could be called a very active or ruling housewife, for gentleness and serenity were the prevailing qualities of her disposition, and she allowed the stream of life quietly to murmur by in her contentment. There was no waste—no extravagance—no carelessness under her mild domestic dominion, but her arrangements were all noiseless in their regularity, and proceeded in the spirit of peace. If there

was any one thing in which she ever upbraided herself for being too expensive, it was in the article of dress. But her husband, although a plain and almost austere man in all his habits, thought Agnes Hay the most beautiful being on earth, and in that beauty he placed all his pride. It needed not many ornaments, but it could bear some, without any diminution of its matronly and maiden-like simplicity. Michael himself worked at every sort of labour, and in all weather; but there was no need for Agnes to perform any other tasks, but such as suited her somewhat delicate health, and when he came home from the hill, and found her sitting at her needle, dressed as he desired, and with Lucy at her work too beside her knee, he felt his whole nature not only supported, but purified by the cheerful presence of so much beauty, innocence, and affection. At evening he saw those for whom he had been toiling during the day; and a feeling far profounder than pride or admiration was constantly in his heart whenever he left or entered the humble porch. An undisturbed quiet was for ever in his house, broken only by the sharp shrill voice of Aunt Isobel, who liked to speak in an upper key, or by her footsteps still quick as those of girlhood,—and sweetest of all sounds, by the prattle and the singing of his Lucy, in features the very image of her mother, but the most gleesome of children, and wild as the fawn in the wood. Yet, in the midst of all her mirth, Lucy would fall hush in a moment at her mother's voice, and all the smiles near-

ly disappear in the composed cheerfulness of her eyes and forehead. Then those golden clusters lay still upon her fair temples; the child, at the bidding of her mother's eye, would take up her book—perhaps the Bible—and read—or in employment equally religious, with her little hands would set the house in order against her father's return, and arrange upon the table his frugal meal. Whether the lark or the linnet sung or were mute in the open air, within there was at all times a music that never was heard with weariness, and in the darkest of days there was thus a sunbeam in the house.

Lucy was only six years old, but bold as a fairy, she had gone by herself a thousand times about the braes, and often upon errands to houses two or three miles distant. What had her parents to fear? The footpaths were all firm, and led through no places of danger, nor are infants of themselves incautious when alone in their pastimes. Lucy went singing into the coppice-woods, and singing she reappeared on the open hill-side. With her small white hand on the rail, she glided along the wooden-bridge, or lightly as the ouzel tripped from stone to stone across the shallow streamlet. The creature would be away for hours, and no fears felt on her account by any one at home—whether she had gone with her basket under her arm to borrow some articles of household use from a neighbour, or merely for her own solitary delight, wandered off to the braes to play among the flowers, coming back laden

with wreaths and garlands. With a bonnet of her own sewing to shade her pretty face from the sun, and across her shoulders a plaid in which she could sit dry during an hour of the heaviest rain beneath the smallest beild, Lucy past many long hours in the daylight, and thus knew, without thinking of it, all the topography of that pastoral solitude, and even something of the changeful appearances in the air and sky.

The happy child had been invited to pass a whole day, from morning to night, at Ladyside, (a farm-house about two miles off,) with her playmates, the Maynes; and she left home about an hour after sunrise. She was dressed for a holiday, and father and mother, and Aunt Isobel, all three kissed her sparkling face before she set off by herself, and stood listening to her singing, till her small voice was lost in the murmur of the rivulet. During her absence, the house was silent, but happy; and the evening being now far advanced, Lucy was expected home every minute, and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel went to meet her on the way. They walked on and on, wondering a little, but in no degree alarmed, till they reached Ladyside, and heard the cheerful din of the imps within still rioting at the close of the holiday. Jacob Mayne came to the door—but on their kindly asking why Lucy had not been sent home before daylight was over, he looked painfully surprised, and said that she had not been at Ladyside.

Agnes suddenly sat down, without speaking one word, on the stone-seat beside the door, and Michael

supporting her said—"Jacob, our child left us this morning at six o'clock, and it is now near ten at night. God is merciful, but, perhaps, Lucy is dead." Jacob Mayne was an ordinary, common-place, and rather ignorant man, but his heart leapt within him at these words, and by this time his own children were standing about the door. "Yes—Mr Forester—God is merciful—and your daughter, let us trust, is not dead. Let us trust that she yet liveth—and without delay let us go to seek the child." Michael trembled from head to foot, and his voice was gone; he lifted up his eyes to heaven, but it seemed not as if he saw either the moon or the stars. "Run over to Raeshaw,—some of you," said Jacob, "and tell what has happened. Do you, Isaac, my good boy, cross over to a' the towns on the Inverleithen-side, and—oh! Mr Forester—Mr Forester, dinna let this trial owrecome you sae sairly"—for Michael was leaning against the wall of the house, and the strong man was helpless as a child. "Keep up your heart, my dearest son," said Isobel, with a voice all unlike her usual, "keep up your heart, for the blessed bairn is beyond doubt somewhere in the keeping of the great God, yea, without a hair of her head being hurt. A hundred things may have happened her, and death not among the number.—Oh! no—no—surely not death—that would indeed be too dreadful a judgment!" and Aunt Isobel, oppressed by the power of that word, now needed the very comfort that she had in vain tried to bestow.

Within two hours a hundred people were traversing the hills in all directions, even to a distance which it seemed most unlikely that poor Lucy could have reached. The shepherds and their dogs all night through searched every nook—every stony and rocky place—every little shaw—every piece of taller heather—every crevice that could conceal any thing alive or dead,—but no Lucy was there. Her mother, who for a while seemed inspired with supernatural strength, had joined in the search, and with a quaking heart looked into every brake, or stopped and listened to shout and hollo reverberating among the hills, if she could seize on some tone of recognition or discovery. But the moon sank, and then all the stars, whose increased brightness had for a short time supplied her place, all faded away, and then came the grey dawn of morning, and then the clear brightness of day, and still Michael and Agnes were childless. "She has sunk into some mossy or miry place," said Michael to a man near him, into whose face he never looked. "A cruel, cruel death for one like her, the earth on which my child walked has closed over her, and we shall never see her more!"

At last a man who had left the search and gone in a direction towards the high-road, came running with something in his arms, towards the place where Michael and others were standing beside Agnes, who lay apparently exhausted almost to dying on the sward. He approached hesitatingly, and Michael saw that he carried

Lucy's bonnet, clothes, and plaid. It was impossible not to see some spots of blood upon the frill that the child had worn round her neck. "Murdered—murdered—" was the one word whispered or ejaculated all around, but Agnes heard it not, for worn out by that long night of hope and despair, she had fallen asleep, and was perhaps seeking her lost Lucy in her dreams.

Isobel took the clothes, and narrowly inspecting them with eye and hand, said with a fervent voice, that was heard even in Michael's despair, "No—Lucy is yet among the living. There are no marks of violence on the garments of the innocent—no murderer's hand has been here. These blood-spots have been put there to deceive. Besides, would not the murderer have carried off these things? For what else would he have murdered her? But oh! foolish despair! what speak I of? For wicked as this world is—aye, desperately wicked—there is not, on all the surface of the wide earth, a hand that would murder our child! Is it not plain as that sun in Heaven, that Lucy has been stolen by some wretched gipsy-beggar, and that, before that sun has set, she will be saying her prayers in her father's house, with all of us upon our knees beside her, or with our faces prostrate upon the floor?"

Agnes opened her eyes and beheld Lucy's bonnet and plaid lying close beside her, and then a silent crowd. Her senses all at once returned to her, and she rose up—"Aye, sure enough drowned—drowned—drowned—but where have you laid her?—let me see

our Lucy, Michael, for in my sleep I have already seen her laid out for burial." The crowd quietly dispersed, and horse and foot began to scour the country. Some took the high-roads, others all the by-paths, and many the trackless hills. Now that they were in some measure relieved from the horrible belief that the child was dead, the worst other calamity seemed nothing, for Hope brought her back to their arms. Agnes had been able to walk to Bracken-Braes, and Michael and Isobel sat by her bedside. Lucy's empty little crib was just as the child had left it the morning before, neatly made up with her own hands, and her small red Bible was lying on the pillow.

"Oh! my husband—this is being indeed kind to your Agnes, for much it must have cost you to stay here; but had you left me, my silly heart had ceased to beat altogether, for it will not lie still even now that I am well nigh resigned to the will of God." Michael put his hand on his wife's bosom, and he felt her heart beating as if it were a knell. Then ever and anon the tears came gushing, for all her strength was gone, and she lay at the mercy of the rustle of a leaf or a shadow across the window. And thus hour after hour past on till it was again twilight.

"I hear footsteps coming up the brae," said Agnes, who had for some time appeared to be slumbering, and in a few moments the voice of Jacob Mayne was heard at the outer door. It was no time for ceremony, and he advanced into the room where the family had been

during all that trying and endless day. Jacob wore a solemn expression of countenance, and he seemed, from his looks, to bring them no comfort. Michael stood up between him and his wife, and looked into his heart. Something there seemed to be in his face that was not miserable. If he has heard nothing of my child, thought Michael, this man must care but little for his own fireside. "O speak, speak,"—said Agnes, "yet why need you speak? All this has been but a vain belief, and Lucy is in Heaven."—"Something like a trace of her has been discovered—a woman with a child that did not look like a child of hers, was last night at Clovenford—and left it by the dawing."—"Do you hear that, my beloved Agnes?" said Isobel, "she'll have tramped away with Lucy up into Ettrick or Yarrow, but hundreds of eyes will have been upon her, for these are quiet, but not solitary glens, and the hunt will be over long before she has crossed down upon Hawick. I knew that country in my young days. What say ye, Mr Mayne? there's the light o' hope on your face."—"There's nae reason to doubt, Ma'am, that it was Lucy. Every body is sure o't. If it was my ain Rachel, I should ha'e nae fear o' seeing her this blessed nicht."

Jacob Mayne now took a chair, and sat down, with even a smile upon his countenance. "I may tell you, noo, that Watty Oliver kens it was your bairn, for he saw her limping after the limmer at Gala-Brigg, but ha'ing nae suspicion, he did na tak' a second leuk o'

her—but ae leuk is sufficient, and he swears it was bonny Lucy Forester." Aunt Isobel, by this time, had bread and cheese, and a bottle of her own elder flower-wine on the table. "You have had a long and hard journey, wherever you have been, Mr Mayne—tak' some refreshment,"—and Michael asked a blessing. Jacob saw that he might now venture to reveal the whole truth. "No—no—Mrs Irvine, I am ower happy to eat or to drink.—You are a' prepared for the blessing that awaits you—your bairn is no far aff—and I mysel', for it was I mysel' that found her, will bring her by the han', and restore her to her parents." Agnes had raised herself up in her bed at these words, but she sunk gently back on her pillow. Aunt Isobel was rooted to her chair, and Michael, as he rose up, felt as if the ground were sinking under his feet.

There was a dead silence all round the house for a short space, and then the sound of many joyful voices, which again, by degrees, subsided. The eyes of all them looked, and yet feared to look towards the door. Jacob Mayne was not as good as his word, for he did not bring Lucy by the hand to restore her to her parents; but, dressed again in her own bonnet, and her own gown, and her own plaid, in rushed their child, by herself, with tears and sobs of joy, and her father laid her within her mother's bosom.

CHAPTER IX.

Jacob Mayne had not, perhaps, either felt more or exerted himself more than his other neighbours, on the occasion of Lucy's disappearance, but her parents continued to entertain towards him an especial gratitude. His was the first sympathy they had received, and he it was that rescued Lucy from that cruel gypsey. Henceforth they could never see him without emotion, and, as he was a worthy man, a lasting friendship was cemented between the families at Bracken-Braes and Ladyside. Jacob, whose wife was living, a quiet homely woman, had one son, a boy of surprising abilities, now about ten years, and two daughters, only a year or two older than Lucy. They were her chief companions; but the girl that Lucy loved most, as she grew up, was Mary Morrison of Ewebank, the only daughter of a widower. Ewebank was farther off than Ladyside, and indeed in another parish. Even that imaginary distinction helps to keep families apart more than distance, and in this case, a range of hills that might almost be called mountains intervened, so that

Lucy did not see Mary Morrison oftener than perhaps once a month, on an average through the whole year. But there was something in the nature of these two young happy creatures, that, all unknown to themselves, knit their hearts to each other. Lucy thought there was no face, among all her other friends, nearly so delightful as the meek face of Mary Morrison, and Mary, who was rather the elder of the two, sometimes contrived an excuse for a walk over to the Heriot-Water, merely to see the joyful smiles of Lucy Forester. Mary lived in a very lonesome house, with a father who no doubt loved, but who was far from being gentle towards her,—and the thought of the cheerful parlour of Bracken-Braes often brought the tear to her eye when she looked at the hill-range that separated it from the dull solitude of Ewebank.

Jacob Mayne had a brother, a man of some property, who had lost his wife and only son many years ago. Jacob himself had had severe struggles with the world, and was now far from being prosperous. He could live, and clothe, and educate his children decently, but that was all. He had not been able to lay by a single shilling, and scarcely any new article of furniture had come into the house for a good many years. Perhaps he was somewhat soured in his temper by this continued poverty; and what occasionally still more depressed him, was the total cessation of all intercourse between himself and his brother, owing to one of those fatal quarrels which, beginning in the merest trifles, unintelli-

gible to all persons but the parties themselves, eventually alienate affection, and leave those who in youth slept in the same bed, to travel down, angrily and apart, to the grave. Michael Forester had endeavoured to reconcile them, but in vain; and he had even so offended Jacob Mayne by his interference, that, for a short time, their familiar friendship had been disturbed. The children, however, had always continued to play with each other, and, while that is the case, the parents wait an opportunity for reconcilement; while Agnes Hay, who had been a peace-maker, ever since she had come into the parish, had done so many delicate kindnesses to Jacob's wife, that at last one day at the kirk Jacob came cordially up to the group, among whom Michael was standing during the ringing of the bell, and entered into conversation with him about the concerns of both their houses.

About two years after Lucy's adventure, there was a deep sensation sent through every household, by the discovery of a sacrilegious crime perpetrated by a man who, up to the time of that wretched wickedness, had borne the highest character for probity and religion—no other than this wealthy brother of Jacob Mayne. The unhappy man was an Elder, and had been observed, by a poor old woman, who had sat down unobserved to rest herself in a shed close to the church-gate, to take money out of the poor's plate, and secret it about his person. The pauper watched him for several Sabbaths, and at last

issued out of her concealment, and suddenly charged him with his guilt, to which she said she had frequently before been an eye-witness. In the tribulation of detected sacrilege, Richard Mayne had not a word to speak. The fierce old crone cried out against him till her voice was heard in the kirk, and before a crowd of people who would all have disbelieved her as a maniac, the Elder confessed his guilt, and demanded to be led to prison.

The very horror of the crime quelled in all hearts any desire of punishment. It shook the whole parish like an earthquake, and there was a disturbed silence in every house. Who might dare to say he could stand fast, when Richard Mayne had fallen under the temptation of Mammon, whom it now appeared he had served, and not the living God? Miserable man, what to him was money—the money of the poor? His wife and his son—they slept in the grave—and for himself, who was more abstemious than he—who more temperate—and who, until this hidden sacrilege, in all his dealings more rigidly just? And of what had Richard Mayne, the Rich Elder, during the unknown length of his crime, robbed the few paupers in the parish—that palsied widow and three other aged women, bedridden or tottering on crutches—the two cripples, one so afflicted from his youth, and the other crushed at his work by a falling stone—and him, that harmless creature, to whom reason had been denied? Perhaps altogether a few pounds, the loss of which had been felt in their

salt and their meal, in their miserable daily dole, by the palsied, the blind, the lame, and the lunatic! Jacob Mayne, oppressed with shame, absented himself with all his family from the kirk—shut himself up in his house, round which no figure was seen moving—and no one for a time went near the abode of the grey-headed worker of iniquity, nor knew whether he was alive or dead. Mr Kennedy, the minister, had indeed gone to his house—and knocked at the door: but a low miserable voice told him to go away, and as he looked up, on his departure, to a window, he beheld the countenance of Richard Mayne as if it were that of an evil spirit already undergoing its punishment. His only domestic had never returned to the house since that Sunday; nor had any smoke been seen since then from his chimney. Pity had not yet begun to work—at least not outwardly—in any human heart towards this great sinner. Even his brother yet stood aloof.

One night after Isobel and Lucy had gone to rest Agnes said, "O Michael, will you not go and see the wretched old man—if he be indeed in life? This misery must be more than he can bear." The summer-fire had been for some time dead on the hearth, but the bright moonlight filled the room, and the door was not yet latched. A shadow fell on the floor as Agnes was speaking, and Richard Mayne himself was in their presence. Long and rueful was the old man's confession, and Michael now thought that

he descried in him, what before the crime he had never noticed, although, no doubt, it had then existed, a manifest taint of insanity. In all his remorse, and it had worn him to the bone, his haggard eyes still gleamed when he spoke of the coins he had stolen from the poor, and betrayed, in a crafty and suspicious leer, the passion of the miser. The old man wept when Michael told him, great as had been his crime, to hope for mercy; but as he wept, he bitterly accused his brother of hard-hearted cruelty, and with a tremulous voice swore before his Maker, that he would leave any thing he had past that family. "I have always received more kindness from you, Mr Forester, than any other man in the parish, and I have made my will in your favour. Yes, I have made my will—I have indeed made my will—a good hundred pound to the poor—and the rest in money and bonds to you, Sir, for you often called in upon me, and were a moderate man in all your bargains. But I have not long to live, and to-morrow I will show myself at market, and next Lord's day I will show myself at church. God grant that she be not there who saw these withered hands robbing the widow and the fatherless—yet there she cannot be, for they tell me she is dead; and oh! Sir! does not her ghost come every midnight, and stand pointing and laughing, with a palsied hand, with bleared eyes, on the old white-headed Judas Iscariot on his straw?"

Michael, in the morning, conducted back the un-

happy old man to his own house—and got a person to take care of him for the short time he had to live. At church and market, however, Richard Mayne appeared. Few remained near him, even as if he had been an infectious lazar. His brother had for the first time that Sabbath attended Divine service; but he left the kirk with his family by a door at the other end from that where the excommunicated Elder sat, and as he never even looked up, it is supposed he did not see the old man. In a few weeks Richard Mayne died, and Michael Forester gave orders about his funeral. His brother received an intimation of it, but did not attend. Nobody was asked to be present but the bearers—and Mr Kennedy and Michael Forester let down the coffin and said "Dust to dust!"

It was soon known over all the parish that the unhappy man had left all his property to Mr Forester. In a few days Jacob Mayne came over to Bracken-Braes, and sat down with a face of angry determination. "I have been a poor man all my life, Mr Forester, and thank God, with a clear conscience, and a well-behaved family, I can submit to poverty for the few years I have to live. Much good may my brother's money do you—Mr Forester—but the love of money is said in Scripture to be the root of all evil, and it was so with my brother Richard. For ourselves, Sir, we were all tolerably well off at Ladyside before you came among us—and we can live although our families should henceforth be strangers. You understand me, Mr Forester.

As for you, Mrs Forester, I have always respected you—aye, your face was always welcome in our house. But this injustice has struck deep, and I could curse the hour in which I was born." With these words, Jacob raised himself upon his staff, and said, " Here I shake the dust off my shoes—let us never more speak in this world."

Michael Forester had gone into his own room during Jacob's speech, and now returned with some parchments in his hand. " Jacob—this is your poor brother's will;" and so saying, he put it into the fire, which was burning briskly on a somewhat chill evening. " You are your brother's natural and only heir, my worthy friend, and the property he knew not how to use, (but you must think on him with the deepest pity, for he was not in his sound mind,) may it for many years prove a blessing to you all at Ladyside."

CHAPTER X.

What a blessed change from a long lot of poverty, in which the wants and necessities of each day are with difficulty supplied, leaving to-morrow and all its uncertain demands unprovided for, and still lowering upon the anxious foresight, to such a competency of this world's goods as sets the hearts of parents free, at once and for ever, from all anxieties but those that must in every condition attend upon their children's conduct, their errors or their well-doing! It is a blessing felt over all our moral nature, to know that our board, however frugal, can be duly spread in security and peace, and that should we be called away on a short warning, those whom we leave behind us will not fall away from comfort into any destitution. Domestic virtue is almost only another name for domestic peace; and although assuredly many bear extremest penury, not only without detriment to their character, but to its purification and increased vigour, yet, with people in general, extreme abasement of condition does mournfully abase the soul, and even our natural affections them-

selves pine and dwindle in that cold and cheerless atmosphere.

This truth was now gratefully felt by the family of the Maynes. Now that his mind was relieved from that trouble of anxiety about his wife and children, which had more or less disturbed him by day and night, almost from the year of his marriage. Jacob Mayne saw distinctly the duties he had either neglected altogether, or very imperfectly performed. He reflected, with surprise and sorrow, on his fretful and irritable temper, that had so often made the house unhappy—on his unreasonable demands on his wife and children who, do what they would, never could please him—on causeless quarrels among those who yet loved one another—on many long evenings of silent dissatisfaction, more painful in retrospect than the angriest contentions—and, above all, on his unpardonable, his unchristian conduct to his brother, with whom he had cherished an inveterate dissension, and had suffered to lead that unbefriended and lonesome life that had finally preyed, as it would now seem, on his very reason, till, under the power of a diseased passion, he perpetrated a crime that was expiated, on earth, by death and infamy. To these, and many other such thoughts, his mind and his heart now gave a ready entrance, and he confessed, in sincere contrition, all his manifold errors to Michael Forester, whose noble character, in spite of all the best means and opportunities of knowledge, he had grievously misunderstood, and

whom he had not hesitated to accuse to his face of hypocrisy and injustice.

But there was no reason why honest Jacob should not in due time forget his errors. His hard-working wife now wore a smiling face, that reminded him of what it was long ago, when he crossed the moors to visit her at her father's house. His girls could now show themselves at church or market with the very best in the parish, nor yet subject their parents to a charge of extravagance, and, above all, his son Isaac, the pride of the country side, could now be sent to College, and become a scholar. Nor was Jacob, bad judge as he was of such matters, deceived in this; for his son was indeed a boy of surpassing genius, a boy of many thousand, born although he was of such very ordinary people, and without one single advantage, working in the fields, even at that tender age, during most of the hours that he could spare from the parish-school. His vacations had been little else than a month's bodily toil; but nature had lavished upon him her choicest mental gifts, and in his ample forehead, and full clear eyes, there was apparent the expression of an extraordinary intellect. Michael Forester approved of the plan of sending him to College, and, accordingly, before he had perfected his twelfth year, Isaac Mayne, the pale-faced thoughtful scholar of Ladyside, left for the first time the farm-house in which he was born, and, without friend or patron, entered with enthusiasm on his academical career.

On the death of Richard Mayne, Michael Forester was made an Elder, and thus was brought more frequently into immediate intercourse with Mr Kennedy. Michael had always been a respected guest at the Manse—but he knew his own situation, and kept it. Mr Kennedy was a man of literary habits, and had also for some years employed his leisure hours in educating the sons of several of the neighbouring gentry. Michael never intruded himself upon his minister's retirement, but they often met notwithstanding, and might be said to have been on a footing of friendship ever since Michael came to Bracken-Braes. Nor are there any purer sweeteners of our mortal lot than those calm and tempered friendships that, while they scarcely seem to constitute any sensible portion of our life, do yet shed their perpetual influence over it all, keeping alive within hearts that feel each other's worth all the best human affections, unimpaired by distance or by time, and ready on the slightest call of duty, to rise up from their silent harbour, and display their strength in the most disinterested and arduous exertions.

Michael's duty as an Elder took him more than formerly into the houses of his brother-parishioners, most frequently in company with Mr Kennedy, but often, alone; and sometimes, too, his wife and daughter went with him when his visits were to the sick or the poor—nor was Aunt Isobel ever found absent when she could be a comfort by fire or bed side. Thus Lucy, who had now reached her tenth year, had her wild

spirits tamed down by the knowledge of duty and distress. As quiet and still were all the pretty creature's motions in a sick-room, as they were dancing and gleesome on the green sward. The smiles that were native to her eyes were not the smiles of heartless levity that soon cease to charm even on the face of beautiful childhood, but they were the smiles of an involuntary joyfulness she could not help, and never tried to cherish, intermingled as it was by nature with the innocence of a guileless heart. The more love she gave away, the more did love overflow within her bosom. She loved her father—her mother—Aunt Isobel—Isaac Mayne—his sisters—his parents—all with a different affection,—and meek Mary Morrison, who dwelt beyond all the braes, for her she kept as it were a secret corner of her heart, where none other entered but she; and if weeks and months passed by, and no Mary Morrison came over to Bracken-Braes, yet still the unobscured image of that sweet girl was almost the same as her living self, and often often did Lucy commune with it sitting in her parlour, or beneath the shadow of the Plane, or by some little clear spring among the hills, whither she had gone to bring home the water-cresses, or to see what was now the number of the spring-lambs. Little as Lucy had seen or heard, that little was all pure and good, or it was the purifying grief that follows repentant guilt, so that, although a mere child, she was in her innocence wiser than she knew, and had learned to

look, even with a thoughtful eye, both on human joy and human affliction.

Never, even in her happiest pastimes, was Lucy disinclined to go with her father or mother to the hut of Elspeth Riddel the widow, who had been a widow, and had lost all her twelve children, upwards of thirty years ago. Close to the side of that frail image, now upwards of ninety years old, would Lucy stand, with upward eyes swimming in reverent pity, while the long locks, white as the driven snow, hung over the golden glow of the maiden's tresses, that changed their lustre at every motion of her head. Lucy, at her bidding, would read the Bible in that lonely hut, and Elspeth said, that, although somewhat deaf now, she never lost a word of that low sweet distinct voice. Garden flowers, too, she would often take to that hut, and Elspeth, dim as her eyes were, knew them all by name in a moment, for long before even Lucy's father was born, had she often gathered such flowers as these for the bosoms of pretty maidens like Lucy herself, who had all, long since, gone down in old age to the grave. "Aye—aye, Mrs Forester, I have seen generation after generation, and bonny faces are for ever passing away on the earth, but a bonnier face than that o' your ain Lucy saw I never in all my lang days, and that I say before herself, for the lassie that will come and speak comfort to an auld forgotten ruin of a human creature like me, may be telt without scaith o' her

beauty, perfect as it is like the beauty of the Rose of Sharon."

Often too did Lucy visit Mooredge, a house only less solitary than that of Elspeth Riddel, whose hut, indeed, had no name, a mere turf-shealing, that had been built in a single day. In the comfortable cottage of Mooredge lived Allan Laidlaw and his wife, now a cheerful couple, although the very summer when the Foresters came into the parish, their three sons had been drowned in attempting to cross a ford of the Tweed, when the river was in flood. To hear these old people laughing and talking, one would have thought that they had never been acquainted with grief. But Lucy had often seen them when no smiles were in the house, and when both Mr Kennedy and her father, who had come there to pray with them, declared, that from such perfect resignation as theirs, they would carry comfort to their own homes, but that they could add nothing to such a frame of spirit. "It is not time that cures our sorrows, Mr Kennedy," would the old woman say, "for time would weary, and waste out, and distract the souls of us mortal creatures. No—no—it is not time, Mr Forester, for as plainly, as clearly, as distinctly do I see now the faces of my three drowned boys, as I saw them on that day, when they were dragged out of the cruel waters—and if me and Allan had, had no other comfort, long ere this hour, would be baith ha'e gaen down in sorrow to our graves."

Thus past the days of Michael Forester and his family. Ten years it was since they had left Dovenest, and, although they had their share of those ordinary anxieties and sorrows that will pass over the surface of the calmest life, yet, during all these ten years, they had known only one miserable night and day, when they feared that Lucy had been lost or dead. And what gratitude could ever repay such happiness? What if severest trials awaited them, had they not been the favourites of Heaven, and had they not reason humbly to trust, that, in their lives, their Maker was well pleased?

CHAPTER XI.

It was the cheerful season of Bark-Peeling, and Michael Forester had been for several weeks employed in felling a pretty extensive wood, about five miles from Heriot-Water, on the edge of the Hirst—a large and old estate belonging to a branch of the Cranstouns. Michael had many persons of both sexes and all ages working under him, and not contented with being merely an overlooker, he had the axe frequently in his own powerful hand, and thus added to his other gains the wages of a labourer, always high in that severe and dexterous employment. Sometimes he slept all night in a shealing in the wood, and on these occasions Lucy would come tripping over the hills, and try to surprise her father by laughing in at the door, even before he had left his heather-bed in the first glow of sunlight. She carried to him in her basket provisions for the day; remained near him till twilight among the fallen trees, and more than once, indeed, she had stayed with him all night in the shealing.

It happened that Michael Forester had been detained

in the wood for two successive nights, and, therefore, the whole family, Agnes, Aunt Isobel, Lucy, and their three-days visitor, Mary Morrison, determined to pay him a visit at his work, and bring him home with them in the evening to Bracken-Braes. They took with them what would be considered quite a feast in the forest; and Aunt Isobel selected a bottle of the choicest cowslip wine, of that celebrated vintage, which had proved victorious over all competition at an annual meeting of the Edinburgh Horticultural Society. Lucy said she had selected a dining-room, on a spot of ground, smooth as velvet, near a spring, over which the huge arm of a fallen oak hung like a canopy that now and then fluttering in the breeze, and tempered to a pleasant coolness the strongest heat of the sun. "There will you three sit—father—mother, and Aunt Isobel, while Mary and I will wait at table—and if you please, sing you a song when you are drinking your wine." Lucy and Mary Morrison carried between them the basket of provisions covered with its white cloth—and thus they stepped cheerfully along over hill and hollow, often hurrying far before, and often loitering far behind Agnes and Aunt Isobel, who took their own good time, not caring if they should not reach the wood till one o'clock, the hour at which their table was to be spread in that wilderness.

The little party, under the guidance of Lucy, penetrated not without some difficulties in their way into the heart of the wood, which covered nearly thirty acres. "What a change since yesterday!" exclaimed Lucy;

"I saw naething o' that brae and that wee bit bonnie glen yestreen.—The auld oaks, as they fa', let many a secret place come into the open light. Waes me for a' the birds and their nests—there's a poor shilfa mourning for her young." Michael beheld them all approaching with a pleased surprise, and left his axe in a wide gap across the stem of a noble oak that reached nearly to its heart's core, and would soon prostrate the giant with the earth. It was, indeed, now the hour of rest and refreshment, and all the clashing and crushing sounds ceased in the forest. "This way—father—this way, father," cried the joyful Lucy, "all of you follow Mary Morrison and me—for we are going to lay the table-cloth in the Queen-Fairy's own dining-room—and long before the moonlight we will leave it without disturbing any of the furniture to herself and her Silent People."

"Remember, lassie, that we are not all so young as yoursel'—here am I an auld woman of three-score and seven, for ten has a fearful sound—and I have walked five good miles without crutch or staff—come hither, Lucy, like a bit roe as you are, and give me your arm to lean on while I take my breath on this branch. Preserve us, what a thickness o' moss, and what soft, grey, blue, red, yellow, aye, all the seven colours o' the rainbow, a' glowing with gold and silver on the bark of a fallen tree. Yet the bark-peelers will strip it aff and fling it aside without ever looking at it. Dear me! that so many tall trees o' the forest should be

brought low to —— tan leather! And yet—I forgot ships maun be built—to say nothing o' houses. Agnes, my dear bairn, is not this wood, in its ain way, a very paradise?"

That word, which Aunt Isobel pronounced with a sort of half self-reproving smile, was not in this case altogether misapplied. For labour, the lot of man, seemed here even in its severity to partake of the character of a pastime. Here from one party, the ringing axes as they kept at regular intervals biting the knotted oaks, brought the short shrill echoes out of the grey cliffs that ever and anon showed some new shaped crag formerly hidden by the umbrage. There a group of women, girls, and boys, and among them some mere infants, were beating the short limber branches, while a nursing mother, a little apart, wrapped in her red gipsy cloak, hushed her baby, and then returned cheerfully to her work. In one place, a number of strong men were hauling trunks or huge arms of trees out of the way, with merry cries like those of sailors at the weighing of anchor. In another place, lads were heaping up the poles together in pyramids, or binding the low cords of fire or spoke-wood. "A rae, a rae," exclaimed many young voices, and away bounded the beautiful animal with twenty shepherds' dogs barking in vain behind its flight. The squirrels, startled at the noise of the chace, ran higher up the branches of the standard-oaks, and the large white owl, issuing from his crevice in the yew-tree, kept floating about in the

darkness of the day-light, and then settled on a branch with his clerical countenance, to the infinite amusement of all the shouting imps in the wood.

"Come along, come along," said the impatient Lucy, "you see they have all left their work. Put your hand on my shoulder, Aunt Isobel, I see Mary Morrison is helping my mother down the brae." A dozen different little dinner-parties were now forming themselves in nooks and corners; while the linnets and the chaffinches, in the underwood, or on the spared trees, whose nests had escaped the general devastation, began to take advantage of the silence, and were chirping and carolling in the shaded sunshine. The cushat, too, moaned from his pine—and two or three herons came flapping their slow and silent wings from some distant lake or stream to the elm-grove that, for sake of those noble birds, was suffered to stand with all its hereditary nests.

Lucy, with finest eye and ear, had selected the place for their Forest Feast. It was a close scene, yet in that covert was felt the whole spirit of the wood. Within the circle of an old charcoal burning-place, the ingenious creature had so placed several wreathed limbs of trees, intermingled with roots and tendrils, that they formed one continued couch with resting-places for back and arm, and enclosed a slab sawn off an antique ash, which, supported by four pillars of unpeeled birch, formed a table at once elegant and commodious. That table was soon set out by Lucy and Mary Morrison; and as soon as the

laughing glee had subsided, Michael blest the table, and, after a moment's silence, the feast began. "Why, Mary, had not you and I green clothes, and then we would have been very fairies?—but Aunt Isobel is looking for a cup of nectar;" and off flew the laughing Lucy with her golden tresses dancing in her delight, and from that spring brought water clearer and brighter than any diamonds—while meek Mary Morrison moved round the circle with gentler steps, and with suitable demeanour, almost as if she had been indeed a servant.

Agnes, who had not been out of the lone pastoral country of Heriot-Water for several years, felt her tranquil heart kindled by the beautiful forest scenery; and as she looked over the multitude of fallen trees through the stems of the standing wood she remembered Dovenest, Hawthornden, Dryden, Lasswade, and Roslin. "Oh! Michael, you surely will not fell yonder tree—look at it—and say if it be not the identical image of the oak that stands beside the ford across the Esk, at the very borders of Dovenest."—"Why, my Agnes, Dovenest, our house and our gardens, and our trees all are gone, or if not gone by this time so much changed, that even you would not know the place. They are building there a paper-mill—the mill-lead runs where were our gravel-walks—and the wheel goes dashing round where our father died and our Lucy was born."—"And why not?" said Aunt Isobel with a cheerful voice, "what were the walls but stone and lime, and the trees and shrubs, and even

the flowers, what but dead matter without thought and feeling? There is, at least, no change in our hearts, my son, but what, I hope, is a change for the better. For my own part, never was I so happy—I never saw you both so happy either at Dovenest or Sprinkeld as you are this blessed hour. There was no Lucy then —"come hither my pearl," and while old Aunt Isobel kissed Lucy's forehead, they were all silent in the hush of happiness.

"Ha! ha!" cried Lucy, "yonder is auld blind Sandy Paisley with his fiddle. Only look, father, how his bonny wee dog, Princy, leads him through among the briars and branches, and how, with his staff feeling round in all directions, the auld man without a single stumble is making his way along the wood! See now—he kens folk are near at hand—for Princy is beginning to cock up his ears and bark—so Sandy has taken his seat on a stump, and now for his fiddle! aye, you'll hear him singing too—hush—it is puir Tannahill's sang wi' Mr Smith's music, "Jessie the Flower o' Dunblane."

As soon as Sandy Paisley's voice and violin were heard, there was an end to all the dinner-parties in the wood, and the old blind musician was quickly surrounded by a crowded audience. Two or three young girls joined in the song, and Sandy Paisley then instantly changed his voice into a firm, deep, low, tremulous second, that charmed the most ignorant and uninitiated in the mysteries of music. "A reel, a reel," was now the general

cry, and half a dozen couple beat the sod to Tullochgorum, while Sandy yelled amain at every turn, and moved his bow-hand till the fingers were almost invisible.

"Are these draps o' rain," quoth the blind man, "plashing on the grun' like lead? and callants and cutties, dinna ye find it close, and sultry, and breathless?—Tell me, are there no ony black clouds in the lift?—hear till't—that growl comes frae the west. The thunder will be rattling like artillery owre our heads, by the time I ha'e played three times baith parts o' the Flowers o' the Forest." Sighing sounds went wavering all over the wood; the western horizon, far and wide, was blackened, and all the work-people flew to seek shelter from the thunder-storm.

Agnes had always been overcome by a thundery atmosphere, and had indeed, for an hour past, felt great oppression, but, in such a happy scene, she concealed her sickness, and had said nothing. Michael, after ordering the work-people to keep away from the standing trees, carried Agnes, almost fainting, in his arms, and laid her on the heather-bed in the shealing where he had slept for the last two nights. Aunt Isobel sat down beside her; and Michael, taking Lucy and Mary under his protection, lay down with them, under some leafy branches. The thunder cloud was now right over their heads, and seemed to explode like a cannon. Every person in the wood, for the space of a moment, was stunned, and there was all around, in the hotness

of the unbreathing air, a strong smell of sulphur. Many started to their feet, happy to feel, by the use of their limbs, that they were unstricken, while a greater number lay concealed in fear among the bushes, from which, now and then, was lifted up the 'frighted face of some cowering urchin. "Where is Mr Forester?" cried twenty voices, and Lucy, who had been lying almost in his arms, leapt to her feet, and stood over her father, who was yet motionless, and seemingly insensible.

While the thunder went away, growling over the wood and the moor beyond, into the eastern mountains, many hands were assisting Michael Forester. Mary Morrison was lying by his side, but, in a few minutes, she awoke, as if from a dream, and looked about her unharmed. There were no outcries—no clamorous voices—all was nearly silent. Michael seemed to recover his recollection, and the first words he was heard to say were, "Lucy—Lucy, how is your mother?" Lucy heard the words with many sobs, but her sobs were changed into shrieks, for she looked wildly into her father's face, and saw that he was blind. The fire of Heaven had scorched out his eyes, and Michael Forester was never more to see either the heavens or the earth.

Michael felt that there had been dealt to him a sudden and severe dispensation. But his soul knew not, as yet, what might be the extent of its great loss, for he knew not whether Agnes and Lucy were alive or dead. Isobel had left Agnes stunned into a swoon by the noise of

the bolt, but, by this time, she had somewhat recovered, and came out into the open air. Michael now heard both her voice and Lucy's, and though it was the voice of weeping and lamentation, yet was he now content. "Puir man—puir man," said blind Sandy Paisley; "is it, indeed, a God's truth, that Mr Forester has been blinded by the lightning?—Puir man I pity him," and he clasped his hands together in strong compassion, the very hands that held the string by which his dog led him from house to house.

In a little while, one of the boys came from another part of the wood, and said, "Sarah Fleming is killed." "Puir orphan," said a voice, "Sarah had no much in this world to wish living for—but she was a hard-working harmless thing, and quarrelled wi' naebody." Two of the wood-cutters brought the body to the spot, where all the others were now assembled, and laid it on the ground. There was no disfigurement of face or figure, but the orphan girl was manifestly dead. She had neither brother nor sister, nor any relation working in the wood. Indeed she had been an only child of parents who died before she knew their faces. And, although, for a week or two, every one pitied Sarah Fleming, her death made small void in that little circle, and on the second Sabbath only a very few missed her face in the kirk.

The body of the orphan now lay unheeded, not from indifference to her fate, but from a sense of the unavailingness of pity, while every one was sorely disturbed

about Michael Forester, and many tried to persuade themselves, that there still might be hope, and that his eye-sight might be restored. But Isobel in her aged composure, Agnes in her exceeding love, and Lucy in the distraction of childish tenderness, all alike knew that hope there was none, and beseeched the workmen to carry Michael to Bracken-Braes.

CHAPTER XII.

From the first moment there had been no hope for Michael Forester. This he had himself known,—Agnes, Lucy, and Isobel, and all who had seen the nature of the affliction. It was a sudden and total change from light to darkness, from free bounding motion over all the varieties of the uneven earth, to anxious and timid steps along the floor of a sick room, or at last to be guided by some living hand within a safe and narrow circle of unincumbered ground, set apart for the exercise of the blind. Such visitations come alike upon humility and pride, sweeping the low and the high places, so that the cottar and the king are equally insecure as the worm that is trodden upon among the grass. Oh! what thoughts weighed on Michael's mind as he felt himself carried in pain and darkness up and down the hills towards Bracken-Braes! Thoughts of dependence and uselessness, perhaps of a life to be sustained on charity!—what a change since the morning he had left them, as he heard the door of his house opened, and knew that he was to see that roof

and that Plane-tree no more! Utterly extinguished were those clear bright bold eyes that had never been afraid to look into any man's face—no more to gaze over the meadows and pastoral braes of his farm—no more to be turned in the delight of pious knowledge towards the glorious luminaries of Heaven—to see sweet little fair-haired Lucy and her laughing eyes no more —nor her innocent hands folded in prayer before her Maker. Unseen by him was henceforth to be the meek beauty of his Agnes. But her soft low voice, that was still to be enjoyed far more than ever, and that blessed head was yet to lie nightly within his bosom. The dire distress met a sort of dim and awful contentment in the depth of his spirit as it descended there; and on the morning of the second Sabbath, as he heard and knew the sound of familiar feet and voices, somewhat as it seemed more cheerful and unconstrained, Michael Forester knew not whether he might not almost be called happy.

"I never heard the kirk-bell so distinctly before. What a calm and clear-aired day must it be, Agnes! Has Lucy gone with Aunt Isobel to the kirk?" Lucy had that moment come into the room, and her father knew her lightest footstep—for, even already, in one little week, had his thoughts and feelings begun to trust more than before to the intimations of the ear. He took his child's hand into his, and felt that her small fingers were enclosing her Bible. "Be happy—my Lucy—in the house of God—for I am hap-

py." Lucy's eyes were all filled with tears, but Aunt Isobel called to her with a kind impatience from the outer-door, that the first bell had ceased; so the child gave her father a farewell kiss, and by the time they had crossed the wooden-bridge, the sun was shining so joyfully, the stream murmuring along with such a cheerful tune, and the lark so happy in heaven, that Lucy's cheeks were dry, and the bright calm of childhood established in her bosom, permanent as the blue region of air lying without a cloud from the morning till the evening of some long summer-day.

The house was filled with the stillness of Sabbath; and the other few inmates had left Agnes sitting by her blind husband. "Oh! Michael! I am a poor weak being—and I fear that I have not been, in too many things, a good poor man's wife. When I look back on our eleven married years, I see myself cherished, and cared for at all times like the best lady in the land. For me and Lucy has my husband toiled early and late, and in all weathers, while I was idle by the fireside. If Agnes Hay was in comfort, my Michael thought not of himself—and, oh! may my Maker now graciously be pleased to enable me to do my duties—different as they must henceforth be—else better that I had never been born. Oh that this dispensation had fallen upon me! for I am but little worth in the house, and would have been well contented to be still and humble in the loss of sight, while you were busy as before at all your works. Oh! my husband! if ever I

have been self-willed, or forgetful, I will weep in remorse of my sins—for you taught me every thing I know, and without your communications of what I owed to God, and my fellow-creatures, more worthless should I have been than even what I feel myself to be, with such a burden of love and duty now laid upon my heart." The blind man would not interrupt that piteous voice, for it reconciled him to his fate. He sat up in his bed, and taking his Agnes's hand into his, "This ring," he said with a smile, "I put on thy hand with joy when thou wert the fairest of the fair—nor have years yet impaired thy beauty. Blind I am—and must for ever be—but thy face will yet be visible, nor will thy smiles ever be as nothing in my memory. Never once—Agnes—never once—hear me, O Heavens! from whom came the scorching lightning—hast thou given me one moment's unhappiness! and if thou repinest not—I shall be as happy—it may be happier than ever. But I know you will not repine—for Agnes Hay, child, maiden, and mother, waking and asleep, by her own hearth, in the open air, and in the house of God, hath ever been a Christian."

Now for a while silent—and now speaking to each other a few affectionate words, three hours had passed away, and the congregation had left the kirk. "Agnes—think, if my eyes had been yet unextinguished, and our Lucy dead, what then would have been the darkness and the silence of Bracken-Braes? Both of us had then, indeed, been worse than blind, for what

then to us had been the unavailing light? Methinks the dear lassie will soon be returning from Divine service, or perhaps they have taken her and Aunt Isobel to the Manse." Lucy had come into the room with feet silent as the shadows, and had heard her father's words. Well she knew how dear she was to her father, but this expression of it so overheard carried her into heaven. She stood still at the foot of the bed—a guardian angel, unseen by him for whom she wept. "Agnes—why are you sobbing?" said Michael; but his Lucy came up to his pillow, and at once melted and overawed, knelt down and breathed a prayer, of which the few, simple, and broken words were assuredly not unheard in heaven.

In the cool of the evening, Mr and Miss Kennedy came from the Manse to Bracken-Braes. Aunt Isobel had had warning of the visit, and had the house in the same cheerful order as if they had been invited to a festival. "Come—Lucy—snod your hair a little, and dinna look as you had been crying,"—and at that kind command, Lucy smiled from her very heart. The tea-table was got ready in Michael's room; and the presence of Mr and Miss Kennedy imposed a pleasant restraint on any too mournful feelings that might otherwise have arisen. The Minister knew the character of his Elder, and his words of comfort were but few. But they were chosen by a fine and pious mind; and the grace before and after that meal touched cords that

long continued to sound in the resigned silence of the blind man's spirit.

Aunt Isobel, who had kept moving to and fro, now ushered in Sandy Paisley. "I hope you'll no be offended, Mr Forester, wi' my coming to see how you are after your calamity. A blin' man like me can feel mair than others in sic a trial. But he can, maybe, likewise gi'e mair comfort." Auld Sandy Paisley was kindly welcomed, and shook hands with Michael in his bed. He was privileged to speak, lowly as he was in character and condition—for he was upwards of seventy, and had been in darkness for forty years. "Wud you believe me, Mr Forester, when I say it, that it's just like a dream to me, the time when I saw the heaven and the earth, the stars, and the flowers, human creatures, and the animals o' the brute creation? My faith, gin I were to get the use of my e'en now, how I wud glower at a' the outward works of God! Gude troth, I'se warrant I could na comprehend them half as weel as I do now. It would be a sair confusion." There was a gladsome tinkle in the old contented creature's voice that made these few words a homily to all their hearts, and Lucy put the tea-cup into his hand with more than usual care and gentleness. "I recollec' that I was ga'en gleg frae the first week o' my blindness. Before that, I never could walk twenty yards wi' my e'en shut, without being terrified o' running owre a precipice, or a coach and six, although I was in a hay-field. But nae sooner was I blin', than away I marched right leg foremost,

without fear o' stumbling owre a stane or a straw. I felt a little nervish and queer sometimes before I got a doggie and string—and you wud ha'e leuch to split your sides to ha'e seen me louping as if I had been demented, high up in the air, and wi' a lang spang, at a bit runner o' water, aiblins the breadth o' my twa hands. I had na learned then, you understand, to calculate soun's; and then when I knoited the ba' o' my foot against a stane, I wud caper as if I had ran foul o' a haill cart-load o' road-metal. But these are auld times—noo I gang dannering alang as steady as a rock, or rather like a ship under sail in a fine breeze on the ocean."

The loquacity of some people—one can scarcely tell why—although endless is not tiresome—and such now was the loquacity of this old blind mendicant. "We're gaun to ha'e a fine summer o't, I'm thinking. I ken by the sangs o' the birds in April what is to be the nature o' July. Oh! but I like the lang days that gang snoving so cannily down the skies—for then I carena whare I sleep. I just drap down behint a stane or a dyke—wi' the kine lying round about me—and the wee bit moorland birds twittering, like perfect nightingales as they are, wi' sma' interruption through the star-hours. Deevil the fear o' ony rheumatics—for I seldom want a drap o' the cretur in a bit leather bottle I keep in ane o' my pouches. Gude safe us" ———"Nay, Sandy, my honest friend—a little more reverent in your language."—"Pardon—pardon,

Mr Kennedy and all the rest—I'm but a puir senseless sinner," letting his voice drop at the same time, "and what would become o' me, stane-blin', and no sae far aff fourscore, 'gin my Maker should forget me wandering by mysel' along the high-roads, or among the hags o' peat-mosses on the lonesome moors."

Michael Forester felt his whole nature strengthened by Sandy's cheerful resignation. Shall I repine—he thought—or question the mercy of God's judgments—when I hear this childless, houseless, grey-haired beggar so happy, over whose dying hour there may be none to watch when it comes perhaps upon him in a snow-wreath, or a storm among the hills! "Did I ever tell you," continued Sandy, "the story o' the Brigg? Weel then—You see there had been a spate in the Yearn-water the day o' John Borland's wedding, and the Broose was to be frae the Manse o' Mearns into Eaglesham. Thinks I to mysel' I should like to see the Broose—that is, to hear the brassle—for I had a kind o' an interest in ane o' the Pownies, Bob Howie's Pyet. So awhile afore the start, aff I sets, intending to take my station on a bit knowe at the Brigg-end. A kittle turn it was, halfway down a stey brae. As I was standing on the bit knowe, hearkening about me, there was something I didna weel understand in the soun' of the Yearn, a maist desperate gurgling, and growling, and rampaging o' water—and the roar seemed to gang clean up to the skies without ony deadening effec' o' stane and lime. O ho! thinks I—what's become o' the Brigg? I gangs cannily on, fit by

fit, wi' Service before me—(no the same doggie as that aneath my chair—but the father o' him,) and Service, to be sure, youfs, and turns about, and rugs at the string like a trout that has been weel heucked wi' a bait-heuck. The bonnie Brigg o' Humbie had sunk down before the spate like a pack o' cards—and Heaven ha'e mercy—there comes the Broose, along the flat afore the rising o' the hill, a' gallopping like mad, wi' a score o' lads riding double, wi' bonnie lasses ahint them. Puir blin' creatures, they were a' gallopping to destruction. Up I gets—and awa like lightning, wi' Service barely able to keep up wi' me—for he was rather pechy, and had never seen his master fleeing in that gate afore—roaring out, 'The Brigg's down—the Brigg's soopit awa' by the spate.' I heard Bob Howie on the Pyet—for weel I kent the cretur's feet like so many hailstanes—'The Brigg's fa'en down'—but on drove the wild deevil, for he feared naething in this warld—while, thinks I, 'The Pyet 'll flee owre the Yearn, and ne'er ken the Brigg's missing.'—However the Broose fell lown, and the Pyet came back to where I was stan'ing, close to the hedge, for there was a power o' rough-shod cattle. 'Ye ha'e saved the lives o' mony o' us—Sandy'—said John Borland—'what reward shall you have?' Says I, 'A kiss o' the bride,'—and I pried her mou', (I ask your pardon, ladies,) for I was a young chiel then—no exceeding saxty, and I had known Nancy Whitelaw since she was a bairn. Never played I wi' sic birr, as at that wedding—and the com-

pany collected for me ayont thretty shillings—to say naething o' claes. The truth maun be spoken—I wasna quite sober for half a week after. There's a gude deal o' meaning in that story, Mr Kennedy—but aiblins you have heard it before—though I never tell't twice the same way, and yet every way is the true ane."

In an hour all visitors were gone—Agnes and Lucy accompanied Mr and Miss Kennedy as far as the Linn, and old Sandy Paisley retired thankfully to his straw bed in an out-house, the sort of lodging which the blind mendicant had preferred to every other for many years.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was within his own heart and his own home that Michael Forester found the most effectual consolation under his irremediable calamity; but the universal compassion felt for him over the parish, and expressed in a hundred affecting ways, could not but breathe its own peculiar comfort. He knew that there was not a single fireside for many miles round at which he was not thought of, and prayers offered up for the welfare of his family. Not a day passed without children dropping in with inquiries from their parents; and offers were made and accepted to perform gratuitously little pieces of work about the farm which could not be delayed, now that the power of the summer-season was strong on the earth. In the discharge of his duties as an Elder, Michael had been in every house in the parish. Families with whom he had scarcely any other acquaintance, now visited him with much of the affectionate solicitude of old friends; while the few to whom he had long been attached by an intimate friendship behaved like brothers, or sons, or fathers. If

there were any persons who looked on the Foresters with unkindly feelings—of envy or jealousy, or causeless offence—they now dismissed all such recollection from their minds, and bore testimony to Michael's worth and the piety of his resignation. Even Elspeth Riddel—the old lonely creature of ninety—who had not been able to attend the kirk for several years, tottered down to Bracken-Braes, and on the utmost verge of life, with the world fast fading away from her dim eyes, and all its bands long ago broken, she eagerly beseeched Michael to tell her how his mind bore this dispensation, and smiled cheerfully when she heard his collected reply, like one still interested in this scene of shadows.

Michael had now almost completely recovered his former strength; and, at first sight, a stranger could not have discovered that he was blind. His deportment had always been quiet and grave, although he was a man of great strength and activity; and his blindness had occasioned but a slight alteration in his appearance and his movements. His high broad ample forehead chiefly fixed the notice of those who regarded him, and in the pleasant calm of his other intelligent features, it was not at first observed that his eyes were extinguished. Michael Forester was generally the tallest man present—and his naturally straight and erect person was little, if any thing, depressed now by the feeling of helplessness or insecurity. On the contrary, much was added to its dignity by that settled calm which,

approaching to melancholy, was only found not to be so when you entered into conversation with him, and found his mind alert upon all topics, and full as ever of the power of intelligence and enjoyment. While ordinary—perhaps frivolous—mirth and amusement went on about him, Michael sat unaware perhaps of the trifling pleasures stirring in the room, or if aware of them, he allowed them to proceed without regret or reproval. He remembered what he had himself been a couple of months ago, and was glad to think that those pleasant pastimes which sweeten life were going on in his presence, although he could now take little or no active part in such recreations. Voices now were to him the sole symbols of affection and happiness—and he felt himself every day recognizing shades of tone in the voices of those he most loved, that expressed to him all the varieties of the most watchful feeling, and seemed even to yield him a deeper knowledge than he had ever possessed before both of their love and their character. A word from his Agnes was now even more than a smile had been before, and when he heard Lucy laughing or singing, in or out of doors, he also at the same time saw the happy creature as vividly in her beauty as if he had gazed upon her with a thousand eyes. Already he felt the gracious processes going on within him, by which nature supplies those losses which would seem fatal to the peace of a mortal being, and finally converts into a blessing that elevates the whole life, that which still continues to appear to

others to be a curse that would almost make death itself welcome to the stricken spirit.

It was now the time of the Sacrament in the Parish of Holylee. The kirk was a very small edifice, and with its narrow aisle, if the passage may so be called that divided the pews, was ill adapted for the celebration of that Rite. Accordingly, it had been the usage, from time immemorial, to administer the Sacrament in the open air. There was a low round hill, not far from the kirk, with a plat of level ground at its foot, of which, as it was a sheep-pasture, the herbage was always smooth and short. Round this green eminence the streamlet glided away like a dream, and within the distance of a few hundred yards an unseen waterfall refreshed the place with a perpetual murmur. The knoll was covered with the congregation, and on the edge of the plat stood a tent from which the zealous minister addressed his flock. On that plat, too, the tables were spread—there the Elders placed the bread and wine—and beneath the blue skies of heaven was ratified that mysterious covenant between fallen man and his Redeemer.

At this Summer's Sacrament, all eyes were turned upon Michael Forester. For several years before, he had been seen there acting as an Elder, but now he did not venture to take upon himself any active duties. Kind way was made for him and his family, as walking between Agnes and Lucy, he entered among the seats placed on the green sward, Lucy had hold of her

father's hand, and every eye blessed the little beautiful guide. The blind man was delighted in his darkness to hear the rustle of the leaves of Psalm-Book and Bible, as the congregation prepared to sing the praises of their God, or looked out the text from which their Pastor was to preach the tidings of salvation. He thought of other meetings of other years, yet his soul was not dismayed.

During this solemn service, the eyes of one young creature, especially, Emma Cranstoun, were often fixed on the family of the Foresters. She was then, indeed, the Lady of the Hirst, for her father had died several years ago, and her only brother was a prisoner of war at Verdun. Emma Cranstoun had been educated fashionably in England, and this was the first summer she had been in Scotland since her infancy. Although one so well born could not want friends, yet Emma, in the midst of riches and splendour, had long been as much to be pitied as the poorest orphan. Her heart was by nature formed for every pure affection, but it had been locked up during those years, when the fountain of feeling flows with most force and clearness. Delicate health brought her to the Hirst, to breathe for a summer the air of her native hills—and being on a visit, for a few days, at the Manse, she now attended the Sacrament at Holylee, and took her place among the humblest parishioners. Early during the service her eyes had fallen on Agnes and Lucy, whom she saw to be mother and daughter. Michael's calamity she had

heard spoken of, and her heart was suddenly touched with emotions of pity and admiration. Although there was little difference in their dress from that of their lowly equals, Emma Cranstoun saw at once about them a finer character of feeling and intelligence. Her heart was interested, attracted, drawn towards the group by the cords of some invisible sympathy, and, after the service was concluded, she told Miss Kennedy, that she wished to speak to her tenant, Michael Forester. The impression which, unaware to them, Michael and his family had made upon the young Lady of the Hirst, was rendered still more favourable during that short conversation; and Emma Cranstoun, who had scarcely ever before spoken to a cottager, because she had had no opportunities, was touched with a new delight, on finding so much sense, grace, and beauty in those whom she had been taught to consider almost an inferior order of beings. Emma Cranstoun was but sixteen years old, and Lucy was eleven, so that her heart yearned towards the child at every blush that mantled round her downcast eyes, and she said within herself, that she would, that very evening, pay a visit to Bracken-Braes.

Emma Cranstoun, the Lady of the Hirst, was accustomed to follow all her inclinations, but these were uniformly innocent. Self-willed she no doubt was, but her nature was a happy one, and even her caprices were virtuous. Her heart had been defrauded, by an imperfect education, out of much that was the natural

dowry of youth, but it had received no taint of corruption. She had retained her simplicity in the midst of false or excessive refinement, nor had the hollow hypocrisies of those to whom the care of her early years had been committed taught her any unconscious imitation of artifice or deceit. The creature of impulse she indeed was, but her impulses were all instinctively towards right actions and the society of the innocent like herself. Of this kind was her strong sudden emotion of love to Lucy Forester. It might be called a mere whim—a sport or sally of the humour—yet who could look on Lucy's face and say, that to love it at sight was either thoughtless or unreasonable? In the calm of the evening, therefore, Emma took with her a single domestic and walked up the vale towards Bracken-Braes.

With a delighted wonder at its perfect neatness, order, and beauty, the Lady of the Hirst stood below the Plane-tree and gazed on the cottage. The enchantment of heavenly music rose from within with many a joyful swell, and many a pathetic close. She knew that the family were praising their Maker—that this was the evening psalm. She turned aside her head to listen more intently—and her eyes fell upon the golden light of the setting sun. The pure evening air—the walk up the vale—the whole solemn business of the day—and the novelty of all around her, worked upon her heart and her imagination; and when the hymn ceased, Emma felt the tears on her cheek, and drew a

deep sigh of disturbed happiness. It seemed as if, since this Sabbath morning, a new life and a new world had been revealed to her, and that before this evening she had known little or nothing either of her own heart or of her fellow creatures.

Lucy was leading her father out to his seat below the Plane-tree, to enjoy an hour of its dim shadow, before they all retired to rest, when she beheld the Lady of the Hirst smiling upon her, with the most affable benignity. "Father—father, our Lady is here," breathed Lucy in a whisper, and Michael turned respectfully towards the sweet voice of their visitor. Agnes and Aunt Isobel were soon of the party, and Emma sat on the osier seat beneath the tree, surrounded by her new friends, who regarded her with affectionate admiration. Agnes Hay was fair in her matronly serenity, and beautiful Lucy indeed was with all her kindling smiles half subdued by bashfulness and humility, but Emma Cranstoun possessed that charm, which only high refinement can give, and which is altogether irresistible and inimitable, when united, as in her it was, with simplicity as unaffected as ever belonged to rural innocence in the most solitary dwelling. "They say that the Cranstouns have ever been a beautiful family," whispered Aunt Isobel to Agnes, "but never surely, since they bore that name, was there a fairer daughter of that house than that lovely image." Then, seeing a slight hectic flush on the lady's cheek, Agnes entreated

her not to sit in the dews, but to honour a poor man's house with her presence.

The conversation led insensibly into the cares and joys, the pains and pleasures belonging to humble life. Emma Cranstoun asked a great many questions, but every sentence seemed to awaken her heart. Hitherto she had seen, and only seen poor men's houses, and passed them by without a feeling or a thought. She had seen the smoke rising from the chimneys in the morning or evening calm, and thought it beautiful, but, as it dissolved in the air, it was forgotten, as if it had been a picture of an unreal thing. Now she looked with intense interest on all the furniture of the farm-house, and, homely as it was, in comparison with the splendour in which she had always lived, she could not but feel how interesting and appropriate it was, and how true the character of every thing belonging to those excellent people was to their condition. "Are all the families of humble life like this?" thought the simple girl; "if so, may I live all my days at the Hirst, and be a daily visitor among the cottages."

The sun had gone down, and there was now as much darkness as there would be during the whole night. The Lady of the Hirst, more than courteously, wished good night to Michael, Agnes, and Aunt Isobel; and happy indeed was Lucy to walk by her side, part of the way, to the Manse. "Do you think, my pretty Lucy, that you could love me, for I wish that we were friends?" Lucy was afraid to speak; the very thought of such a

superior being to herself calling her friend, was more than the simple child could for a moment imagine. But all the way back from the Manse, beneath the moon and the stars, Lucy was thinking, in her delight, what she could do for that beautiful lady—how she could serve her in any way, however small, only to show her gratitude—and, when she thought on that sweet smile, and still sweeter voice, addressed to her blind father, Lucy felt that she could die willingly for one so free from pride, so lovely, and so compassionate. Agnes, whose quiet heart was yet at all times filled with tenderest anxieties about Lucy, this night laid her head on her husband's bosom with an assurance that her child had found a friend—and that fair and benignant Creature was before her in her dreams.

CHAPTER XIV.

Little more than half of Michael Forester's lease of twenty-one years had expired when he had lost his sight, and during the first despair of that deprivation he had thought of giving up his Farm. But he soon felt that there was no necessity for doing so—and that with faithful assistance he could continue to pay his rent, and do justice to the beautiful property he had so long cultivated. That assistance he had found in William Laidlaw, a nephew of the old childless couple at Mooredge. All the braes had long been clear pasturage—the holms by the streamlet's side were rich in natural soil and generous treatment—each inclosed field had been brought to sustain unexhausted its due rotations of crop—the small coppice-woods, preserved from sheep and cattle, flourished amain with their oaks, birks, and hazles—while here and there among the hedgerows stood an Ash or an Elm of no mean growth, and casting a grateful shadow in the pastoral solitude. Now that nearly three years had elapsed since his blindness, Michael had every reason to believe that Bracken-Braes still pre-

served its superiority over every other farm in the Parish.

During these three years it was astonishing what progress Michael Forester had made in that practical education which the blind pursue under the guidance of nature. Indeed he had many and great advantages over the generality of men reduced to that condition. His strong natural talents and deep natural affections had all been genially cultured and cherished—so that from the first week of his affliction, his mind and his heart had neither of them been left desolate. Thoughts and feelings had been stored up against that evil day, and the blind man felt strong in knowledge and in love. His habits had from boyhood been of a thoughtful cast, and when the presence of the visible world was veiled from his eyes, his meditations only became more concentrated—or rather more spiritual; but there had been no violent wrenching away or breaking off, and in an incredibly short time memory supplied the place of sight, and her images were substantial as realities. His body and his limbs were powerful and active beyond those of most men; and he soon learned to plant his feet on the ground without shrinking or timidity, and to walk along fearless of all obstructions. A hundred sounds unnoticed before were now familiar to him, each signifying something useful for the blind to know. He by degrees observed how all surrounding objects modified his perceptions. Measurements of relative distances were unconsciously made in his mind every

shorter or longer walk he took, and paths became known to him alone, existing not to the eyes of others, but traced out by his ear and his touch. The stream could not wind its most noiseless way without his ear detecting the altered murmur over deep or shallow. He knew in a moment precisely where he stood, as the gentle din of the tiny waterfall rose up from among the hazles. The cawing of the rooks rising or falling on his ear told him how far he was from the Hirst-woods—and he knew from the plover's cry before he came to the edge of the moss. Echoes, that others heard not, whispered to him the path in his solitude. The hollow ground—the acclivity—the bent—the lea—the light gravelly soil—the heavy till—the moss turf—the heather-patch—the wet rushy flat—the stony upland—here and there a huge rock—or an extended precipice—by help of these characters he reperused in his darkness the country around him that he had so long studied with open eyes, and thus every month he heard and felt his way farther and farther among the braes, hills, and mountains. He soon found that his long staff was indeed like a feeler, as old Sandy Paisley had told him, and that it was really very part of his existence. But it was not thus that all his practice had been acquired; for his gentle, patient, and devoted Agnes was for ever at his side—or Aunt Isobel, whose lamp burned with a more cheerful glow as the mist of years gathered round it—or Lucy led the way with a dance and a song, or hushed and silent as an undisturbed lapwing

walking on the solitary lea. When alone, which he not unfrequently was, even at a distance from the house, he knew that the eye of God was upon every footstep of the blind, and, beyond all doubt, that very calamity itself brought wisdom. The creature was told by a still small voice to throw itself upon its Creator.

In such a state of mind, what a blessing was such a wife as Agnes! What if a vain, light, unintelligent woman had been called upon to assist and comfort him, even although conjugal affection had subsisted in her bosom! But here was a guardian being constantly near him, night and day, strong in peace, innocence, and piety. No stormy passion had ever broken the calm continuity of her blameless life. Never had she denied God or her Saviour by vain repining or wilful disobedience. Her Bible had not been taken up casually, giving unwelcome intimations that were neglected in worldly cares, or that served only to sadden the heart with the touch of feelings too solemn and sacred to hold long alliance with mere earthly affections. But in that Bible she had, from the dawn of reason, seen revealed a light that never was eclipsed by the clouds of this world. Let her read that book a thousand and a thousand times, not a single page ever became wearisome on the repetition! To what state of the soul might not one or other of those touching Parables be applied! On evening of work-day alike as on that of the Sabbath, had her heart ever been open to that Sermon on the Mount! So that when her

blind husband was sitting by the fireside, that blazed with the old roots his own hands had collected, and Lucy working, or reading, or singing beneath the quick notice of Aunt Isobel's eyes, while all the room was else silent but the tick of the clock or the rustling noise in his wicker cage of a thrush that had never known liberty—at such an hour, in that hut, restorative and like a voice from above was the memory of those words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven!"

And during the three years of her father's blindness, how had his Lucy shot up into a stately flower! On that disastrous day in the Hirst-Wood she was but a child—now she was the fairest maiden of all the hills. Month after month had Michael felt her head growing up beneath his hand—and he had not now to stoop so low to kiss her cheek. Her voice had lost much of its infantine tone—and was deepened into a mellow music. Free still were her motions in the open air as those of the fawn at play—but she stepped about the house, of which she had now her own part in the arrangments, with a blythsome carefulness; while at church, she sat as perfectly composed and attentive during the whole service as the oldest person. Her feelings were naturally quick, warm—almost impatient; and when left wholly to herself, Lucy might sometimes be wayward and headstrong; but when any duty called her to her father, then in a moment she was hushed, like a lark that drops down suddenly into its nest from the

sky when the shadow of the hawk is seen on the hill-side. Nor did Michael Forester deny to his Lucy any of the harmless pastimes suitable to her age. Each season had its holidays; and perhaps winter, with all its snow, gloom, and darkness, was to Lucy the cheerfullest time of all the year. Then she and the Maynes went for a month or two to the dancing in a barn near the Manse, or to learn church-music in the village school. But above all the other festivals that came between their long intervals of homely life, tinging them with the hues of imagination, was merry Halloween. In that secluded glen, the mirthful superstition of that night was felt to be prolonged almost from winter to winter. Bracken-Braes was most frequently the chosen scene of the revels. The commodious kitchen was decked with branches of the hawthorn, red with its humble fruit—and with the holly-boughs, cut without mercy, and in spite of all their prickles, to brighten the festivities. Then the easily excited spirit of childhood and youth threw all its feelings and all its fancy into the hazle-nuts that cracked away from the ruddy embers—and many a pretty face, in vain pursuit of the swimming apples, hung over the water-pail, with its long heavy tresses to be readjusted by the hand of some boyish sweetheart. Meanwhile the older people carried on their own conversation by the chimney-nook—undisturbed by the noisy mirth that gave a happier flow to their own thoughts—and many a joke went round the circle—the wit of the lowly mind that seldom lacks in its content-

ment a strong trace of kindliness, and wisely sports with the hardships of the poor man's life.

Nor had that visit of the young and beautiful Lady of the Hirst been the last, by at least a hundred, during those few years at Bracken-Braes. Emma Cranstoun's heart had received, on that Sabbath, an impression which was never to be effaced. Not without great injustice could it have been said that the innocent girl had not, before that day, been a Christian. For, in the midst of all the vanities with which her steps had been surrounded, she had never been a stranger to the place of worship, nor unacquainted with her Bible. But the influence that ought to have been prevalent and abiding, had been but partial and transitory; that book had been taken up only at formal intervals of time far otherwise occupied; and the Sabbath-day not more than decently observed, stood by itself uncommunicating with the week, so that a pious spirit had still to be rewakened and renewed. Neither had the life she had been constrained to lead frequently stirred her best human affections. But as soon as her eyes had been opened to the knowledge, however limited, of humble rural life, she beheld before her wants that she could supply, sorrows that she could assuage, evils that she could avert, and joys that she could increase tenfold; while, thenceforth, all the precepts of christianity, either of will or deed, seemed to call upon her for obedience and practice. She had carried the beauty of her presence into every house in the parish,—her charities

under the advice of Mr Kennedy and Michael Forester, had become every season more effective,—and happy were all, rich, independent, and poor to see that, on those errands of real religion, the lady whom all loved had drawn new health from the pure gales of heaven—that all symptoms of that fatal malady had left her cheek, and that Providence, under whom she humbly served, had bidden her own native hills breathe into her bosom a stronger spirit of life.

And where, during all those years, was poor forgotten Mary Morrison, Lucy's earliest friend? Had all their affectionate thoughts towards each other, as they had often sat in the same plaid, in the moors and mosses, passed away like the sounds and the shadows of that solitude? Had Lucy lost in her pride, now that she was a guest even at the Hirst, all her more than sisterly love for meek Mary Morrison in that lonely hut with her stern father? No, Lucy learned other lessons from Emma Cranstoun—and she who had been Mary's helpless friend in their infant days, had now become her benefactress. For she had ventured to speak to the Lady about Ewebank; and Abraham Morrison, with whom the world had gone hardly, had got such a reduction of his rent, and such remission of arrears, that he had not only kept his head fairly above water now, but, which was a great admission from him, acknowledged that he had reason to be contented. Lucy's love for Mary was the same as ever—there was no inequality in their condition—although Ewebank was indeed a

far poorer place than Bracken-Braes;—and while Mary showed, by her whole behaviour, that she thought Lucy far her superior in all things, besides her beauty in which there was none indeed to compare with her in both parishes, yet Lucy, true to the bliss of former days, and without even the shadow of change, saw in Mary the very perfection of sense and sweetness, and with the same open and yearning heart as ever, as she came from visiting the Lady of the Hirst, turned away up the narrow birchen-glen of Ewebank, and by the ingle, or on the brae-side, whispered away a few happy hours with Mary Morrison.

"Oh, Lucy, dear," said that humble creature, as one day they were sitting in their plaids on the hill, "do you know that I dream so often of my mother, that sometimes I think it must be her ghost that visits me in my sleep. She seems to weep—although not like one of us mortal creatures—and asks me if I am happy." "How very young you must have been, Mary, when your mother died! For I never saw her—but has she aye the same face in your dreams?"—"Aye—Lucy—aye the same white mournfu' face she wore when I used to sit upon her knee. I remember it just as weel as if she had been buried yesterday. My father was not at home the day she was taken away. Oh! dear! Lucy—how my father looked and groaned for months —perhaps a year—after her death. Do you ken, I dinna think she was very happy—my father is unco severe—sometimes—and if it were na for you, Lucy,

I wud sometimes maist wish myself i' the mouls. But when I think that surely we twa will be freen's a' our days, then I canna help singing by mysel', or being cheerfu' as the morning."—" Aye—sure enough—Mary—our love will never die—and long as we behave ourselves well, the Lady of the Hirst will be our friend. But, look—Mary—the sun is going fast fast down—farewell—farewell."—" Oh ! dinna be lang o' coming to see me again," said Mary with tears in her eyes, " and above a' things, dinna think that I lo'e not my father. O, Lucy ! when my father smiles—or even when his countenance is without a frown—my heart beats as if I could gang up and kiss him—and after a', every ane has his ain way, and my father has his—there is nae reason to think he does na like me his only bairn, and when I was in the wanderings o' that fever, he was, I am tauld, sairly distracted." The two innocent young creatures parted on the hill-side—Lucy towards a cheerful home, filled with comfort, peace, and affection, where blessings awaited her from every voice and eye, Mary Morrison to a hut, perhaps silent and solitary, or overspread with the gloom of a parent's countenance, who knew not how to look kindly in his affection upon his only child.

CHAPTER XV.

Lucy Forester's fifteenth spring was now dawning upon her beauty, and although she had sometimes brought the tear to her mother's eye, and awoke Aunt Isobel's short-lived displeasure, by childish indiscretions and forgetfulness, yet amidst all the allowable levities of girlhood that occasionally led her into little acts of disobedience wilful or undesigned, one single instance of unkindness or neglect to her father had never been laid to her charge. Often and often had she refused making up parties of pleasure with her playmates, because he might expect her to take a stroll with him to a neighbour's house, or into the quiet pastures; and not unfrequently, when on the very eve of some rural festival, she found that it was right she should remain at home, the loving child had done so, not only without murmuring, but with a proud delight. Her childhood was now over, or nearly so; and her father, knowing that she was approaching the verge of that season when all life would insensibly appear to her eyes covered with a different colour, and when her affec-

tions would be liable to wounds from many causes that to her had as yet no existence, felt an anxiety for her sake taking hold of his very heart, and almost disturbing his sleep. "Our happiness," he would sometimes say to Agnes, "has been too perfect to endure much longer," and he began now to be unhappy whenever Lucy was out of hearing.

At the Manse there had lived, for about a twelvemonth, a youth called Edward Ellis, the son of an English gentleman of fortune, who had been an intimate friend of Mr Kennedy. He was now nearly seventeen years of age, extremely handsome, and an universal favourite over the whole parish. Edward Ellis was a boy of fine talents, but his mind had not yet taken kindly to books, and, although not at all deficient in the common scholarship of that early period of life, all that he knew had been learned almost intuitively, for his heart lay in those pursuits that brought him into immediate and free intercourse with his fellow-creatures. He rejoiced to accompany Mr Kennedy on his walks or visits—and thus he had become quite a familiar guest at the firesides of the cottagers, and at none more so than that of Bracken-Braes. He was not, of course, without the romance of that season of life, and Lucy Forester was the Queen of his Fairy-Land.

The love of Edward Ellis, however, was not such as to break his slumbers, destroy his appetite, or sicken him with his amusements. On the contrary, he slept as soundly as any cotter after a day's darg, ate heartily

at all his meals, and few good days past by in winter or spring, that he was not on the hills with his gun, or on the banks of the river with his angle. His day's amusement, however, three times a-week, terminated, somehow or other, very luckily just at the gate of Bracken-Braes. Most happy were they to receive the noble boy at all times, and Michael's spirits, it was observed, were always raised by his animated, open, and intelligent conversation. "If all rich people, all ladies and gentlemen," thought Lucy, "are like Emma Cranstoun and Edward Ellis, how happy must life be in the palaces of great cities!"

Lucy was not often from home when Edward Ellis called there, but when she chanced to be so, she felt something like a disappointment. She never went now on an errand down to the village, a dozen hamlets bearing the name of the parish, that she did not, unconsciously, entertain a hope that he might be angling within sight, or meet her somewhere in the neighbourhood. She had never thought much about her own beauty, till she overheard Edward Ellis praising it in warm admiration; and, from that time, Lucy Forester would stand a few minutes at her mirror, after she had arranged her simple dress, and, perhaps, return to it again to alter a ringlet over her forehead.

The quick eye of Aunt Isobel saw, but without any pain, the attachment of their sincere and uncorrupted hearts. It was a delightful dream, that would, of itself, pass away, and yet leave no wound behind. In another

year, Edward Ellis was to return to England, and the image of Lucy would then seem to him like that of some shepherdess of whom he had read in a pastoral poem—while Lucy, happy in the humble enjoyments spread around her feet on the floor of her father's cottage, would let him depart for ever to the land of his nativity, nor send after him, when a month was gone, more than a tender wish for his perpetual welfare. Yet the thoughtful old lady, in praising Mr Edward Ellis, always took care to speak of his departure from the glen as not far distant, and probably for ever; at which times, Lucy would give something almost like a sigh, and kept her eyes fixed pensively on the ground; but the indistinct dream soon deserted her imagination, and she would break out a-singing in her happiness.

There was a little waterfall of singular beauty, about half a mile from Bracken-Braes, just half way down the stream to the Manse. The green hills closed in suddenly upon some low rocks that lay quite across the stream, so that the waters parting in two nearly equal divisions, poured over in separate cascades into the pool, while between them rose up a natural pillar, from whose base sprung a few weeping birch-trees, and a single mountain ash. About a rood of grass-plat was level with the sleeping waters below, and down into that solitary, but always cheerful place, a sheep-track led along one side of the brae. An old decayed Yew, covered entirely with ivy, and called the Howlet's Nest, stood within reach of the spray that kept its mantle in

perpetual verdure. Here Lucy bleached the garments she brought from Bracken-Braes, and here Edward Ellis was fonder of angling than in any other pool on all the water. Undesignedly, but fortunately, had it become a Trysting-Place to these youthful lovers.

There are often days before February has closed, that come down unexpectedly and without warning from heaven, with a delightful summer feeling that is not exceeded in softness even by the balmy June. On such a day, Lucy and Edward found themselves together beside the Howlet's Nest. "Will Lucy Forester give Edward Ellis a lock of her hair, to keep for the sake o' the bonniest lassie in a' Scotland, when he may be wandering afar off, perhaps in a foreign country, away beyond the seas?"—"Oh! me, Mr Ellis," cried Lucy with a beating heart, "are you, indeed, going away from Holylee never more to return?" and tears she wished not to reveal, in the sincerity of her innocent affection trickled down her cheeks, from which the rose-leaf colour had in an instant vanished. "No—no, my sweet Lucy, not for another year at least, and that is a long long time, is it not? with many months of long summer days, and many months of long winter nights, it is hard to say which the happiest." Lucy felt relieved from a deadly feeling; for a year, to her young imagination, did in truth appear an almost unbounded time; and since Edward Ellis was not to leave Holylee for a whole year, she was again nearly happy as ever. Edward took one of her rich auburn ringlets that

hung over her temples, and while Lucy stood still in her joyful tears, he fastened a little gold brooch on her bosom whose beauty, like that of the white lily, was alike fair in shade and sunshine. "Now, Lucy, sing me one of Burns's songs, and, if you please, let it be 'To Mary in Heaven.'" The happy girl at once complied, and, while Edward Ellis laid his hand upon her shoulder with all the tenderness of youth, she sung that beautiful hymn to the melancholy accompaniment of the lonesome waterfall.

Isaac Mayne, the scholar and poet of the Vale, came down the foot-path, and stood before the pair, just as Lucy was singing, for the last time, the pathetic line that commences and closes the hymn. Isaac was several years older than Lucy—about seventeen—but having been in Edinburgh for successive winters, and when at home buried in his studies, he had not been much at Bracken-Braes since she had been a mere child. Isaac Mayne, however, under silent and shy habits concealed strong passions, and while he seemed to be giving all his intellect and imagination to the study of books, he had yielded up his heart to violent human emotions. He had all along resolved, within his own heart, that Lucy Forester should, some day, be his wife; and the flower was growing, he thought, in its solitude to the perfection of its nature, without any eye but his capable of discerning its consummate beauty. Sometime, during the last summer, he had looked on Edward Ellis with a jealous eye—and now that he had left

Edinburgh for a single holiday, he came upon him standing almost in an embrace with his own Lucy Forester. Pride—rage—shame—jealousy and grief all entered his heart together, and mere boy as he was—indeed what else were they all but children—the same pangs rent his breast as ever drove manhood into insanity or death. His pale cheek became sallow—his dark eyes flashed fire—he thrust his hand fiercely through his raven locks—and his frame, that had been feeble from his infancy, shook as in a slight convulsion. He scarcely spoke, but passed by frowning and sullen, and disappeared down the narrow pass, as if on his way to the Manse. Lucy wondered a little at his abrupt manner, but said that poor Isaac Mayne was ruining his health and spirits by too deep study. Edward Ellis saw the truth, and with the pride of a successful rival, laughed at the rude scholar, and said, " I hope Isaac will not drown himself for love."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Come, Lucy," said Aunt Isobel, "lay down your knitting, and give us a lilt, my lassie—any air you like—for your father seems drowsy I think—your mother has not said a single word for at least ten minutes—yourself have been mute as an image ever since you took that net into your hand—and not a soul can I get to converse with me—this is dull dreary work, and that perpetual drive of blashing sleet against the panes is enough to deafen one's very life. Come—my bonnie bird—gi'e us something heartsome."

It was a genuine Scottish March night, wild as in winter. There had been a keen frost all day, and the wind had almost amounted to a hurricane. It had, with the fall of darkness, become more fitful, and there being a sort of thaw, a thin wet snow-shower had for hours been whirling about the glens. Only the week before, and there had been many gentle appearances of Spring. The gooseberry bushes were green in all the gardens—the hawthorn hedges had begun to bud—here and there the early willows had put out a few

yellow blossoms to the chance bee—the forenoon sun had wakened the insect-world—and the angler had been seen walking down the stream. But now the waters were again sheeted with ice—both rivulet and tarn; and the pale aspect of the skies had foretold that the shepherds would soon have work to do up among the hills. The noise without doors had made all silent within;—but Lucy, always ready to waken from her short reveries, dropt her netting at Aunt Isobel's request, and laying her folded hands on her lap, and fixing her large soft hazle eyes on the floor, with her head and all its clustering ringlets tenderly inclined towards her father, who roused himself from his half slumber, and turned his face upon his child, smiling even as if he really saw her beauty brightening in the blaze of the kindled fire—she hummed a few low sweet uncertain notes, and then richly and simply as the Grey-Linnet warbled one of her father's favourite Ballads, the Gaberlunzie Man—

"The wind blaws cauld from Donought-head."

The small audience sat mute for a few moments at the close of the air, and Lucy had again taken up her work, when Michael said, "I hear a foot at the door—no Gaberlunzie man, I warrant—for now-a-days they keep better under cover on wild nights—and the beggar takes his supper comfortably by the ingle in the small way-side public-house, if no cotter has taken him in—

it will be one of the Raeshaw shepherds that have been down at the Fords looking after the early lambs. Has he gone by without stepping in?—No—that's a stranger's rap—and it sounds as from a feeble hand." Lucy sprang from her stool by her father's knees—but Aunt Isobel was before her. "Stand out o' the draft o' the door, ye delicate thing," and then she opened the door but a little, for the blast came down the glen in a very tempest. "Pity me—who are you that faces such a hurricane?—Come in—come in," and a figure in a tattered dress, covered with cranreuch and icicles, but in no haste to enter, came at last reluctantly forward on the floor, while Aunt Isobel shut the door against the snow that had been drifting into the middle of the room. He muttered a few indistinct words to Isobel's reiterated questions, who and what he was?—and seemed as if he was not altogether in his right mind, although perhaps it was only the inclemency of the night that had benumbed his senses.

But Michael—the blind man—whose ear was finer than the mole's—rose from his chair and advanced towards the stranger. "What! are you an auld man—said ye?"—"Aulder in sin and iniquity than in years." "It is my brother Abel—as God liveth and dealeth mercifully—it is my brother Abel." The staff fell from the frozen hand, and Abel was upon his brother's bosom. Agnes and Isobel gazed upon the wretched man, but for a while they recognised him not—that ghost-like being could not be the laughing and blythe

Abel of Dovenest! But Michael feared not that it was his brother whom he held to his heart—for faint, broken and feeble as that voice sounded, it was still the same voice that he had heard for so many years in that quiet garden. Lucy, who now and then had heard her uncle's name, but pronounced as the name of one assuredly in his grave, looked on the figure before her almost with fear, like one risen from the dead; but, as she touched his withered hand, cold as the ice, love and pity arose within her for her father's brother. Never before had Lucy seen her father weep—and in his tears there was something so awful to her young heart, that she shed none herself, but stood in perfect silence, a little aloof from that meeting.

They now saw through his utter wretchedness all that remained of the Abel of other happy days. Though he was cold to the touch, and quite frozen, yet he never shivered. His body was forgotten by him, and his mind, that mind once so quick and bright, so full of fancies for the young, and feelings for the old, overflowing with resources for every season—it was now manifestly worn out, impaired and shattered. He scarcely returned his brother's embrace—his eyes looked around bewildered and mistrustful—and he said, "Are not you Michael Forester that lived once at Dovenest? If so, then hear me, Michael, for I am your brother Abel, who ruined you all by forgery, yet turn me not out of your door till the storm is over—Where

is the old man, our father, for I see him not, and perhaps he is dead?"

A bed was soon made by the fireside, and the wanderer's head was on the pillow. Long had it been, no doubt, since the squalid beggar had lain on such a place of rest. Many years were at last over of houseless want that now had no record even in his own darkened memory. But there he now lay apparently in peace, with the snow-white sheets carefully folded round him, that had been woven from their own few flax-ridges, and spun by old and young hands in the long merry winter nights, when, alas! Abel was wandering far off and unknown! Fourteen years and more had passed since he had parted from them in fear and danger at Dovenest. And who, thought Michael, can count the agonies, the diseases, and the despair of all the hours, days, weeks, and months, that crowd themselves into so many unbefriended and homeless years?

"O, Michael! what means that look about your eyes?—What is it that I heard about you at a house near the mouth of the glen?"—"I lost my sight by lightning four years ago, brother, but I feel small loss of my eyes now—yet would that for a little while I could see my Abel's face once more." Remembrances of old times now seemed to be crowding in upon his mind, but every word he spoke showed how indistinct and confused they all were; while, of what he saw, or of any thing connected with the present condition of

the family, he asked not a single question, just as if his powerless understanding had submitted itself entirely to a dream. Much they wondered how he had found his way hither—where he had heard of them—and, above all, from what region had the wanderer come. Some instinct seemed to have led him unawares to Bracken-Braes, for it was plain, from his wandering looks and unconnected words, that Abel knew not, for any continued length of time, in what quarter of the world he now was, nor whose fireside it was at which Providence had given him that bed of rest.

Perhaps there had been times, when anger had entered into Michael's heart, thinking on all the ruin which his brother had brought upon him, times too, when all anger had utterly ceased, when he had not only reconciled himself to the belief of Abel's death, but felt that it was better so, and that he did not even wish that he were in the land of the living. Then had come years almost of forgetfulness, and the blank of oblivion. Michael had never ceased, not perhaps even for a week, to think of Dovenest, and his father, and his brother. But that was the real living, innocent, and happy Abel; the brother of these latter years was nothing else but the image of a dim and disturbed dream. But now, from lands, perhaps beyond the seas, and at the expiration of so many years of rueful banishment, had come the brother, whom he had so tenderly loved, to all appearance a dying man. Well was it for Michael that he did not see his brother, for although yet a young man, his hair

was quite grey, and all his features shrunk and fallen, like the face of old age. That voice told a mournful tale to the blind man's heart, but still he could not image before him such a sight as Agnes, Isobel, and Lucy now beheld lying on that bed. He thought of Abel, changed, wearied, and worn; but they saw the very ghost of Abel, swathed as it might seem in its winding-sheet.

Abel refused all sustenance—and lay almost without speaking a word quite motionless on the bed. But warmth and rest were sustenance to him, and sleep was coming to his aid. The Psalm was sung in a lower key not to disturb him—but he was yet awake, and the voice of Lucy, like that of an angel from Heaven, was singing to his ear forgiveness and peace. Laden with guilt, as was the wretched man, yet in our Father's house there are many mansions—all of them happier and more blessed than the most untroubled recesses of any earthly household.

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL anger, grief, hope, and despair, regarding his brother Abel, had long past away from the heart of Michael Forester. And now, after fourteen years' absence, which had been looked on as the separation of the grave, the two brothers, who had always loved one another so well, slept with only a thin partition between their beds. Michael could hear his brother's disturbed breath during midnight. They sat again at the same board; but Abel's mirth and merriment had long been at an end; he scarcely ever opened his lips. Ingenious had he been with his cunning hands at all manner of work out or in-doors, making his very amusements contribute to his toil; and then, in hours of perfect leisure, no musical instrument had ever come wrong to him—he made them all discourse, and acquired skill was put to shame by native genius. But all these accomplishments that had enlivened Dovenest for so many years had long deserted their master—the very remembrance of them no more abided in his brain—all was weakened in his mind, or utterly decayed;

and it was plain to every one, that if Abel survived, nothing could restore the powers of his memory and intellect. But let Providence spare him even thus, and an asylum was prepared for him in his brother's house at Bracken-Braes.

During the whole of April, and on towards the middle of May, Abel lost and regained strength of body every twenty-four hours. "Had he come a year earlier to us," often said Michael, "we could have saved his life." Nature within him struggled to survive, for the heart and the mind of the unfortunate man felt the change that had come over him, and would fain have remained among so many images of peace and repose, after such weary and rueful wanderings. Sometimes, now decently and comfortably clothed, he wandered by himself into the fields, with eyes still watching him, and sitting down on some sunny bank, remained for hours motionless, like a shepherd watching his flock. When in the warm afternoons the family took their meal beneath the Plane-Tree, there Abel was seated among the rest—and to a stranger's eye his face betokened nothing distressing, nothing but a placid melancholy, for the features were still remarkably handsome, and preserved an expression of intelligence which was no longer within the mind. More than once since May-day, on which there had been a small Festival, he had been observed to weep, and Agnes thought that a good symptom, for the tears seemed to flow on account of something that was fast coming more distinctly into his memory. And

true it was, that Abel's mind gradually became less and less obscure. But as his faculties grew stronger, his bodily frame grew weaker and weaker; and finally, he asked leave to remain in his bed, saying, that he had heard a voice calling upon him from the other world, and that he wished to prepare himself for departure.

When it was seen that the bed on which Abel lay was soon to be a death-bed, there was not around it much outward demonstration of grief. It even seemed best that it should be so, for he had run his race, and sorely wearied indeed was he, now that he had reached the goal. Little—nothing could be done by skill—every thing he desired by affection. The neighbours knew his state, and came no farther than the door. Mr Kennedy alone crossed the threshold. Abel lingered in this way, suffering no sort of pain, but smitten motionless for several days, during which Michael never left his bedside. He gathered up each sentence—each word that the dying man articulated often at long intervals, and bound them together into affecting meanings. Both brothers were grateful to God for the wonderful restoration of Abel to his sound mind. It was impossible for any mortal man to be more truly penitent and contrite, and seeing around him nothing but countenances full of love and forgiveness, he could not but believe in the mercy of his Maker. All his knowledge of the Bible revived with his restored power of memory—and he was told, that great

as had been his sins, he might hope for the salvation Heaven offered to all believers. He seemed to hold his eyes fixed for a long time on Lucy, and then life left his lips so quietly, that it was not till his brother lifted up his hand that they perceived Abel was among them no longer. The silence of the house was rather more hushed than before—that was all—and they who had loved him so well dried up their tears. Abel had been in foreign countries, and driven about the wide world by land and sea. They buried him in a quiet nook of the kirk-yard of Holylee—and before the next Sabbath, there was a stone at his head inscribed with his name and age. Rumours there had perhaps been among the firesides about the character of the dead man; but fifteen years bring oblivion even of great deeds and noble triumphs—and except his own family, there was not one at Abel Forester's funeral who knew what he had either done or suffered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In about a week after the funeral, Michael received a letter from England, the contents of which he immediately communicated to the family. Abel had told him, a few days before his death, that he had joined his wife, Julia Mansell, at Ambleside, soon after he had left Dovenest—that she had died there in childbed—and that he, alarmed by the hue and cry that had pursued him even to that retired village, had fled to Liverpool, whence he had escaped as a soldier in a transport then sailing for the West Indies. This child, of whom he had never since heard, he left a few days old in the Poor-House. Michael Forester had written to Mr Colinson, the Vicar of Ellesmere, whom Mr Kennedy slightly knew, inquiring if any thing could be heard of such an infant—and he had now received an answer, that "Scotch Martha," as she had been always called, was living, and servant to a cotter in his parish.

Nothing was ever done hastily, or without due premeditation, at Bracken-Braes. Some communication,

however, there must be made, and that right speedily, with this orphan girl. As the servant of a small cotter, in the north of England, no doubt, "Scotch Martha" might very probably be, and continue to be very happy—but it was Michael Forester's duty, and his strong desire, too, to know exactly the condition and character of his new-found niece, and then to judge what ought to be done for her in future. What is there, thought Michael within himself, to prevent me from going to Ellesmere, and ascertaining precisely from Mr Colinson, the Vicar, what is my line of duty on this occasion. The resolution was no sooner suggested than formed. "I will take Agnes with me," exultingly said the blind husband aloud, "and see if in all the houses of Westmoreland, Lancashire, or Cumberland, be they the houses of cotter, tenant, statesman, vicar, or esquire, there be any maid, wife, or widow to be compared with my own Agnes Hay!"

When this plan was first laid before Aunt Isobel, she declared most explicitly that both Michael Forester and Agnes Hay were mad, and that such would be the opinion of the whole parish, if they were seen carrying it into effect. "You without your sight, my dear Michael, and my daughter there, delicate as a house-lamb, to think o' venturing by yourselves away into the woods, and lakes, and mountains, and wildernesses of a strange land! Order the lassie to come down here to Bracken-Braes—are no you her uncle, and has not the power o' her dead father devolved into your

hands? Order Scotch Martha down." But ere long, Aunt Isobel began to see the matter in a somewhat different light, and to speak with less decision. "Why, my dear Aunt," said Michael, "would you grudge Agnes Hay one single marriage jaunt in fifteen years? I took her with me on our marriage-day from Sprinkeld to Dovenest—not a quarter of a mile, as you know—and from Dovenest I brought her to Bracken-Braes, not very unlike a soldier's wife on a baggage-waggon—not above three or four times has my Agnes been as far as Lasswade to see her old friends there, for they have been good enough to visit me here—and you know how she has remained like a shadow by my side since that day in the Hirst-wood. Well, then, do you grudge her a jaunt to the land of the English Lakes, which people say are so beautiful, and of which Agnes Hay has a soul to see the beauty, aye to see it, and feel it too, although she may use but few words, and these of a calm kind?"—"But, pity me, Michael, it's a long long journey, my son—and are you sure our Agnes is able to bear it? If you think so—and if you will both be happy travelling together into merry England, then, Michael, all I say is, go—go—and God be with you till you come back to Bracken-Braes."

Preparations were busily set a-going for their departure. Lucy had at first longed to accompany her parents into England. To the imagination of one, who had never been more than eight or ten miles from home, that long travel seemed like an adventure in a tale.

Fain would she have flown away from Bracken-Braes to that far-off country, on the wings of youth and joy, to return again ere long, like a bird that, at evening, comes back from the cultivated valley to its moorland nest. But neither her father nor her mother had said a word about taking her with them; and besides, her heart told her that she must remain with Aunt Isobel. Reconciled, therefore, without one murmuring thought, to what could not well be called a disappointment, Lucy set herself, with all her heart and soul, to get every thing ready for the journey. Her needle had no rest from morning to night. Up with the lark was Lucy, and never down till after the night-hawk. Aunt Isobel was busier than any bee; while Agnes herself, who, in her gentleness and composure, seemed idle to unobserving eyes, sometimes was acknowledged, at the close of day, to have put through her quiet hands fully as much work as both together. For Aunt Isobel's fingers were but feeble, cheerful as was the old lady's talk, and Lucy was off her seat a hundred times a-day, looking for that which was not lost, undoing, or doing over again, what was already done, and, in the confusion of her happiness, making progress by many little circuitous paths, followed because they seemed to be so much shorter, so that sometimes she could not help laughing at her own mistakes, and, throwing down her work, would trip out into the sunshine, and observe whether the skies looked settled for fine weather during the journey to England.

Michael Forester had held several consultations with William Laidlaw, Mr Kennedy, and Jacob Mayne, on all that was to be done about the farm during his absence. For even to Michael, the prospect of being away perhaps a fortnight or three weeks was accompanied with some little anxiety. He had always considered himself absolutely necessary to all their on-goings about Bracken-Braes. The very crops he almost feared would not grow after his departure; and he thought the sheep and lambs on the hill-side would miss the blind man who used to walk quietly amongst them with his staff. But all these important arrangements were made—all orders, oral or written, delivered and understood—and now, by sunrise, on a beautiful June morning, Mr Kennedy's taxed cart was at the door, drawn too by his strong sober steed, and driven by Alexander Ainslie, one of the sons of the Soldier's Widow, an urchin who had been about horses from the time he could crawl, and although only fifteen, nevertheless an expert and cautious Jehu.

Lucy and Aunt Isobel accompanied the travellers to the very end of their own valley. As they passed the Manse, there were Mr and Miss Kennedy to wish them, for the twentieth and last time, a happy parting and return, while the latter handed up to Agnes a basket full of choice viands, lest provisions should be scarce in the barren parts of England through which she understood they were to pass; and Edward Ellis, who was going to angle, as he said at any rate, down the

stream, leapt up into the vehicle beside Lucy, and away drove Alexander the Great in his pride amidst many gazing villagers. At Broomyside-toll there was a parting, with a few tears and many smiles—Michael, Agnes, and Alexander, to distant Ambleside—Aunt Isobel, Lucy, and Edward Ellis, to near Bracken-Braes.

CHAPTER XIX.



NOT a single adventure befel the humble travellers all the way from Bracken-Braes to Ellesmere. The country through which they passed had not much beauty of any kind to boast of; yet Agnes, seated by the side of her husband, thought it often exceedingly beautiful, and described to him all she saw with affectionate animation. Michael Forester had, more than once, been in the North of England, and a few words from Agnes made him understand clearly where he was between stage and stage. He often turned his face towards the different scenes, in the vividness of recollection, and seemed just as much as Agnes to enjoy the calm bright weather of June. There were several friends' houses by the way, where they received all due hospitality; and, after crossing the Border, the neat way-side inn, with its front white as snow, and sign hanging perhaps from the branch of an old Elm-tree, that stood in the circle before the porch, was cheerfully entered at the close of evening, and found to exhibit in its interior almost all the comfort, quietness, and re-

gularity of a private dwelling. The equipage of our Scottish travellers was far from contemptible, to say nothing of their own appearance, which was such as to ensure respect everywhere—while their driver became more dexterous and dignified as they advanced into England, and would fain, on various occasions, have entered into competition with gigs and post-chaises, which he could not see splashing by, without a flourish of his whip, betokening a sense of conscious superiority, were he to put Sampson on his mettle. The object of their journey was a right pleasant one, and they had left their home strong in its guarded innocence; so that there was something delightful to them both, thus to be at a distance from it, and their spirits rose almost to the level of those more youthful emotions of happiness that they had experienced at Dovenest, when not a cloud had past over their wedded life, and when every sunrise had brought a new day of brighter or deeper enjoyment.

"Oh! beautiful indeed!" exclaimed Agnes, moved beyond her ordinary composure; "most beautiful!" when, from the hill of Orresthead, she beheld Windermere, and all her sylvan isles, lying without one breath of air, beneath the sunlight and the blue marble firmament! What a depth of peace in that resplendent water! What quiet pastures encircling the small retired bays! Never before had her eyes fallen on such verdure as crowned these hanging groves, and woods that seemed to cover the hills even to their very sum-

mits! The houses too, how sweetly hidden in hollows, or revealed on eminences rising over the little vallies, with here and there an old noble tree flinging a wide shadow over the open ground that lay covered with sunshine! All apparently the dwellings of comfort and independence! Agnes then thought of Bracken-Braes, and its solitary pastoral valley, where she knew almost every single bush, and every linn that murmured over its shelving rocks—the few houses too, from Rae-shaw down to the Manse. Holylee seemed to be a reality—the scene before her a vision and a dream. But now a beautiful girl, about Lucy's age, past by with a cheerful salutation, and the heart of Agnes leapt within her, for she knew that, at this very hour, Lucy and Isobel were sitting, according to their tryst, under the Plane-Tree.

Michael Forester had long been perfectly happy in his blindness, and no more wished that he could see, than any other person wished to discern objects beyond the horizon; while Agnes, knowing his complete resignation, seldom or never felt very unhappy now for his sake. But as they proceeded along the banks of Windermere, she could not help shedding a few tears for her husband. The beauty was of such a delightful kind, that as it entered into her spirit, she wept to know that it existed not for her Michael. Why should she gaze on that heavenly region in selfish and unpartaken delight? But her husband turned towards her with a smile and said, "Tell me when the lake is hidden by

a wood, not unlike the Hirst, and with here and there a grove of larches, now doubtless grown into good trees since I saw them planted twenty years ago, for that is Calgarth, the abode of Watson, the defender of Christianity against the Infidel, and a name, therefore, venerated by the firesides over all our own Scotland. Humble people, like us, my Agnes, who pass by his gates, may well give a blessing on his venerable head, for he has secured to many a poor man his belief in his Bible, and that is bestowing charity on the human race." Agnes wiped away the idle and transient tear, for what mattered it that woods, rocks, and lakes were all veiled from her husband's eyes, since at all times his soul could commune with solemn or cheerful thoughts, and although deprived of the sight of men's earthly habitations, knew how to meditate on their immortal destinies!

As their journey was drawing near a close, Michael and Agnes began to feel a stronger interest in its object, and to converse earnestly about their orphan niece, to whom they were about to become parents. In that conversation, even Windermere had entirely escaped the notice of Agnes, and, on looking towards it once more, it was gone—and Alexander Ainslie had dismounted at the foot of a steep rocky hill, up which he observed it would be prudent for them all to walk. On descending the other side, they found themselves in a glen, and Agnes said to Michael, that she suspected they were within half-a-mile of the Vicarage of Ellesmere.

The party from Scotland had been expected at the Vicarage the night before, and the Vicar had now sauntered down the lane with his daughter Ruth, somewhat impatient for their arrival. He knew their character from Mr Kennedy, but now that he beheld them, he could not help being struck with a feeling, even stronger than that of respect, on their very first appearance. There was a humble dignity in the demeanour of the Blind Man, that almost impressed Mr Colinson with awe, while the beauty of his wife, which was no way impaired, only softened and shaded by years, and the perfectly lady-like gentleness of her manner, came upon him altogether by surprise, for of that he had heard nothing from the good Minister of Holylee. Greetings were interchanged, and, in a few minutes, Michael Forester and Agnes were introduced in due form to Mrs Colinson, and seated in the Vicarage. What was its external appearance—how many windows it had in front —whether it were thatched or slated—had it a porch or no porch—whether it were sheltered by trees, or gave its roof to the sunshine—Agnes had been too attentive to their kind host to observe; only she thought there were high hawthorn hedges, with hollies intermixed all the way from the gate to the house, and that she had seen, close at hand, an enormous Tree, which, from its barkless and involuted trunk, must surely be a Yew of many centuries.

The best preparation had been made for mutual regard between those, who, in a very few hours, felt for

one another what may well be called friendship. It is not easy to tell what qualities of conversation are most winning or impressive in early intercourse, or why they are so—a few sentences, often giving us a higher opinion of the speaker's moral and intellectual powers, than any sentiment contained in them would seem altogether to justify; while frequently most excellent talk fails to make us esteem very highly the person exhibiting himself, and leaves us in the belief of his being, after all, but an ordinary, and in no way very delightful character. Long before sunset, all hearts within the Vicarage were touched with the kindest impressions, and Michael felt proud in the conviction that his Agnes was already loved and admired by the whole family. Of himself he did not think; but Mr Colinson, who was merely a sensible and good man, without any pretensions to scholarship or talents, was much affected by the Blind Man's superior character, and listened with more than respect to the plain eloquence of his speech, for it deserved no other name, and to the strength and soundness of all the thoughts that came from him with that easy and natural flow peculiar to minds familiarised to early habits of reflection. The Vicar had a son too, just arrived from Cambridge, where he was a student of two years standing, and the intelligent and well-informed youth perceived that, even in his own scholastic acquirements, he might not be greatly superior to this Scottish peasant. But this was not Michael's thought, for he lightly esteemed the little know-

ledge he had been able to acquire in youth, and to retain without loss in his blind years—and he doubted not that, in a few days, he would receive much instruction from the Cambridge scholar.

Just before twilight "Scotch Martha," who had been sent for to a cottage about two miles distant, came to the Vicarage. Agnes saw in a moment that her features bore a certain resemblance to those of Abel. The greatest kindness was shown to the Orphan—but there was no extravagant display of feeling—for Martha seemed cheerful and contented enough—was apparently in good health—and did not exhibit much emotion in her first interview with her relations. Her manner, however, was simple and pretty enough as she dropped Agnes a curtesy,—a smile was in her eyes that shone with something of the same keen light that had belonged to her father's,—and although her dialect was not wholly intelligible at first, either to Michael or Agnes, yet there was a kindliness in the tone of her voice that was pleasant, and seemed to bespeak a character of cheerfulness, alacrity, and contentment. To the question, if she thought she would like to go to Scotland, Martha answered instantly, with little or no thought, that she would like it very well,—for the young creature had no very strong or tender ties to bind her to her present place, and was plainly not only willing, but eager to go any where, however far off, with those who addressed her so affectionately, and whose very appearance assured her, inexperienced and ignorant as she

was, that they were good people. Besides, had they not come from a distant country merely to see her—a poor orphan? And was not she about to have a father and a mother?

Never, during all their fifteen years of wedded life, had Michael Forester and his Agnes lain down to rest more perfectly happy, than they did this night at the Vicarage of Ellesmere.

CHAPTER XX.



The Vicar and his wife soon made their visitors acquainted with the history of their niece. Poor Scotch Martha had passed the first eight years of her life in the poor-house of Ambleside, a miserable establishment indeed, where little attention was paid either to the bodily or mental wants of the paupers, and where idleness, vice, and disease were seen in their most squalid and loathsome union. The child had been removed from all this wretchedness into a cotton-mill, where she was bound an apprentice; but the bankruptcy of the proprietor liberated her along with many other pining pale-faced creatures, after two years imprisonment—and Scotch Martha then became the sole servant to a very poor couple, carriers between Ambleside and Hawkshead. In that hard but healthy service she had now been four years, with very small wages no doubt, and scanty fare; yet the pure airs of Heaven had been constantly blowing about her, and the orphan, for whom few or none greatly cared, had notwithstanding been happy in the quick and strong spirit of youth, which

is in itself happiness, and so tenacious of life that it will not be stifled but in the very grave. To have been reduced to such a condition as that of poor Martha, would have broken the heart of many a child; but Martha had never known a better,—and was reconciled to all its hardships and privations. She had been always accustomed to much indifference or neglect, for she was alone in the little world in which she lived, and while every one else had brothers, or sisters, or near relations, Martha had none, and also knew indistinctly, although without pain, that there was meanness or shame in her birth. Yet nature had not suffered her heart to be very sorely depressed. Some kind attentions she met with occasionally, and these she treasured up in her memory with a keenness of gratitude proportioned to the rarity of their occurrence, often repaying the slightest civilities by the warmest affection, and looking on those as her friends who had only perhaps spoken kindly to the orphan on the road, or on the footpaths as she was bringing fuel from the wood or moss. The old couple, in whose service she lived, were extremely poor, and wholly uneducated. Their sole endeavour of mind and body, in this world, was —to subsist. They were by no means without religion —but it was a religion received passively—its usages observed decently from long custom, and even so observed not without a blessing—while their knowledge of the Bible, as neither of them could read, was imperfect and confused, and had been, previous to the time Martha came to live with them, acquired entirely from

the church service. Martha herself had been at the free-school for a month at a time, now and then, when she could be spared from her work—but her education had been small indeed, and, in that slavish condition, there was no time for reading any book. Yet on the Sundays, when dressed in coarse clean garments, and mingling with decent people at church, the hard-working and neglected orphan no doubt felt something of the sacred influence of Divine Worship—and every month, as she was growing up to womanhood, had learned unconsciously more and more of her duty to her Maker. The misery and vice which her eyes had been made to witness during too long a childhood, were all utterly forgotten—and narrow as the sphere now was of her thoughts and feelings, Scotch Martha was at least a harmless creature, and under such tendance as she was now about to receive, likely enough to turn out an amiable and intelligent young woman.

Michael Forester lost no time in settling matters with the cottar in whose service Martha lived; and it was agreed that, after their small harvest, which would be over in a week or so, and a few other trifling matters, she should accompany her relations to Scotland. So Martha continued, without any unnecessary visits of interruption, at her usual toils, the severest of which were now light in the foreknowledge of a speedy termination to her servitude. She was already quite a changed creature—bolder and more free in all her looks, smiles, and motions—the chains

she now wore galled not at all, for in a few days they were to be thrown aside, and she herself to be taken as a daughter into her uncle's family. Yet long habit had attached her even to that severe and solitary life, and she now and then could almost have sighed to think that she and the old people were in a few days to part probably for ever. Cheerfulness and joy, however, were Martha's chief companions now—and she longed to be in Scotland, of which she had read in those songs and ballads that spread through adjacent countries a certain knowledge of each other's customs and character, and true as they often are to nature, are felt and understood among all the varieties and differences of provincial life. It was soon known too that Scotch Martha was come of a respectable family—and all the neighbours round were pleased that so industrious and harmless a girl should have been so providentially rescued from the uncertain evils of an orphan condition.

Martha had not many leisure hours during any season, and this was with her, perhaps, the busiest time of all the year. Yet, now that she and the old people were to part, she must leave them a few keepsakes, that the sight of the trifles might sometimes recal to their minds her who had shared their poverty. Out of her "sair-won penny-fee," she purchased a few articles of wearing apparel, and sat up an hour or two longer after her work to leave them fit for use at her departure. On looking back over the four years she had lived in their hut, nothing rose to her recollection but their small kind-

nesses, and her own most cheerful hours—their anger, or neglect, or severity, were all forgotten. They were both too exceedingly old—not much less than fourscore—and, perhaps, their next servant would not be so attentive to them as she had been, and leave more hardships on their age. Martha knew that she was going to live with her own relations, and could want nothing; and, therefore, besides those keepsakes, she determined to give the old people back her last half year's wages. As her necessities disappeared, the orphan felt her nature becoming every day more kindly, and she began to do what she had never done before, to look with the pleasure of hope into the years yet to come, and to feel that Providence, perhaps, intended her for a life of happiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

Michael and Agnes were now positively domesticated at the Vicarage. They had become perfectly acquainted with the ways of the family—and quiet, regular, industrious, and not inelegant ways they were, admirably adapted to preserve that competence which the inmates knew so well how to enjoy. Agnes described to her husband, when they were alone, all the beauties of the habitation—its slate-roof with so many irregularities which were all seen, on the slightest attention, to have each a meaning, use, and character of its own—the tall round chimneys surmounted with the blast-breaking slate-flags, and rising up almost fantastically through embowering trees—the porch, itself a parlour, with its niche-seats, and outwardly overgrown with roses and jessamines—the hollies and laurels glittering among the other shrubs whose beauty lay more in their flowers than leaves—the smooth-shorn circular lawn in front with its central dial-stone—that prodigious Yew, under whose shadow the kine were milked —the stately Elm-grove with its rookery, a pleasant din

—the tops of woods seen in the distance, and the soft-blue misty-light floating all between the meadows belonging to the Vicarage, and the rocky or verdant mountains that encircled the glen, and showed a different outline, under the changes of the atmosphere, many hundred times between the morning and evening sun. Michael knew the scene, from his wife's description, almost as well as if he saw it, and with a smile said, he hoped Agnes would not forget Bracken-Braes.

They were not allowed to forget any one thing they had left, for Lucy, although she had never written a letter in her life before, now sent them long dispatches full of news about all that was stirring in the parish. These epistles, written in the true conversational style, when read to Michael, brought Lucy close to his side; and as they contained no secrets, they were given to the perusal of the whole family, one after the other; for Agnes was proud of her Lucy's accomplishments as a penwoman, nor had she any reason to be ashamed of the natural strain of sentiment that ran through them from beginning to end. "Our Lucy—Mrs Colinson—had the best education, I may say, from the time she could speak—for her father taught her every thing himself before it had pleased God to take away his sight—and ever since syne she has been constantly about his knees, so you may all ken what advantages our Lucy has had above any other girl of her age."

Only a fortnight or three weeks ago, and those now

so affectionately disposed towards one another, and so happy in each other's society, had been mutually ignorant of the existence of the two Families! Why need friendship, although a sacred plant, be of slow growth? No doubt its flowers are not all disclosed, but under the influence of tears, which are to it like the evening dews—and if tears were all that were wanting to the friendship of the Foresters and Colinsons, they were soon supplied—for Agnes had been unwell for a couple of days, having exposed herself, it was thought, too much to the mid-day sun observing the merry work in the hay-field, and now lay in a low but oppressive fever, of which the symptoms became daily more alarming, till her medical attendant, Mr Ianson, at last pronounced her to be in imminent danger.

At the beginning of his wife's illness Michael Forester had behaved with that calmness and composure accordant with his character. But no sooner had Mr Colinson intimated to him something of the truth, than it seemed as if he had spoken to a different man. That grave and resigned demeanour was in a moment changed into the wildest distraction. While his features grew rigid in his agony, he clasped his hands together, and turning his sightless countenance towards heaven, he uttered a short prayer for mercy. The big tears rolled down his cheeks, and he groaned aloud without any restraint. It was not possible for any human heart but his own to know what his love was to his Agnes. It had pleased God to destroy his eyesight, but even the

first troubled days of that affliction had been calmed by the piety of his wife. Love, affection, gratitude, and reverence towards her had been accumulating in his heart for several dark years, till now Agnes was to him the being that kept in care its very pulses, and without whom it would cease to beat. Was Agnes indeed to die? "Dreadful are thy judgments, O Lord!" And the strong man fell down upon his face, deprived of sense and speech. When he awoke to a sense of the condition of Agnes, that fit of passion was in no degree abated. Religion itself gave him no power over his misery, and he confessed to them all that his spirit was in rebellion against God, and could not submit to his terrible decrees. Where, now, was the merit of all his previou... ...nation? Joy and delight had been graciously interfused w... der that he had borne them former trials; and no wonder impatience. But now it was to be ... murmuring not Michael Forester, with all his virtue and al... faith, was willing to acknowledge the supremacy of his Maker, or to lift up a brow of despair, which is only another word for helpless anger, towards the heavens now black with mortal judgment! At that hour his soul was weighed in the balance and found wanting—for he thought that he might now take the evil advice offered to the man of Uz—Curse God and die. Unhappy mortals! whose best affections lead to disobedience of the commands of Him who gave them for a blessing in this vale of tears! Happy mortals! who

may come to know that even into the deepest wounds those affections can suffer, there is a Divine hand that can pour a balm that flows in the fountains of heaven!

CHAPTER XXII

CHEERFULNESS and tranquillity had reigned in and about the house at Bracken-Braes during the whole month of June. The spirit of Michael Forester had seemed to preside during his absence; and for the first week after the departure of her parents, not unfrequently had Lucy looked up when a shadow came to the door, half forgetful that her Father was away, and expecting to see him enter and lay down his staff. Loud and merry was the murmur of the Plane-Tree, where the hill and the hive-bees met in multitudes, regardless of each other among the honey-dew, and Aunt Isobel and Lucy, according to agreement, sat below it at stated times every day, that Michael and Agnes, when far off, might think they beheld them in that pleasant shadow. Oftener, perhaps, than usual did Edward Ellis come now to the house; at least so thought Aunt Isobel; and, indeed, he could not otherwise see Lucy, for many were the injunctions her mother had given her never to leave the old Lady long by herself, and the affectionate creature never cared to go out of the gate at the end of the avenue.

"You never go now to the Linn—my dear Lucy—perhaps, for any thing you know, the Howlet's-Nest is gone. What would you say to find the old Yew destroyed, and all its bright ivy? Do—sweet Lucy—take a walk down there to-morrow evening—you can easily make an errand to the Manse—nay, I will tell a white lie, and say to Aunt Isobel, that Miss Kennedy wishes you to drink tea there. Mind now—my beloved Lucy—do not make me unhappy—I will not leave the Linn till the first star. But there comes that everlasting Aunt Isobel." Slight as was the fault of that stealthy assignation—which, indeed, Lucy had not, except by her silence, agreed to hold—she felt as if detected in doing something wrong when Aunt Isobel looked into her face, and no doubt saw its beauty overspread with many innocent blushes. Edward Ellis felt he had spoken a little disrespectfully of the good old Lady, and set himself to make amends by his pleasantest courtesies. There was a charm in the graceful boy's manners which never was lost on any one—young or old—below that roof; and when he rose to go, Aunt Isobel even pressed his stay. But Edward giving one anxious and hopeful look to Lucy, took his fishing-rod, and disappeared.

When to-morrow evening came, great was the struggle in Lucy's mind, whether to go or not to go to the Linn. She remembered the serious injunctions of both her parents never to leave Aunt Isobel in the house by herself—but the white lie had been told—the long

summer evening was wavering by dewy and calm—that sun, which in another hour or so would be setting, was indeed a golden sun, and so were the clouds that lay over the golden sky,—the stream as it went gliding on towards the Linn, seemed to murmur on her to accompany the music along its banks—and she thought of Edward Ellis leaning, perhaps, at that very moment against the Yew-tree, and almost angry at her non-arrival. "Surely there can be no great harm," thought Lucy, "in my just going to tell him not to wait any longer, and singing to him 'Auld lang syne,' or the 'Flowers o' the Forest.'" So Lucy put on her bonnet, feeling notwithstanding her slight disobedience, that while she loved Edward Ellis, her affection would only be for a month or a year when he would be gone for ever, but that she belonged, indeed, to her father and her mother, and would live with them contented and happy all the days of her life.

She was standing at the door looking at the sun that now shone right over the Cairn-Craig, when, to her surprise, there were Mr Kennedy and Edward Ellis coming up the avenue. They bade her good evening with more serious looks than she had ever observed before, and her heart sunk, she knew not why, in an indistinct foreboding of some evil. Mr Kennedy immediately began to speak to Aunt Isobel about their distant friends, and opening a letter which he said he had just received from Mr Colinson, informed them that Agnes was far from being well,—indeed that she had a fever, and

that her husband, not without reason, was unhappy for her sake. He then read the letter aloud, and Lucy could not but know that the life of her mother was in danger. She heard it with a pang of conscience, and in spite of Mr Kennedy's calm voice, and hopeful expression of countenance, wept in a fit of fear, pity, and grief. "Nay—nay—Lucy—do not weep so," said Edward Ellis, with a cheering tone; "the fevers in that country are sharp and severe, but not dangerous—not often fatal—your mother is in God's hands—and do not fear—Lucy—but that she will recover." But every comfort was wasted upon the terrified child, and she looked in vain for encouragement to Aunt Isobel, whose face had undergone a dark change. Mr Kennedy and Edward remained about an hour in the house, and Lucy, who accompanied them a little way down the vale, whispered to the latter with a sob, "O! Mr Ellis—Mr Ellis—can you meet me to-night at twelve o'clock—aye, at midnight at the Linn?" and she retired weeping to the house.

Aunt Isobel did all that affection and pity could do to comfort Lucy—but all in vain—they were able, indeed, to say the evening-prayer, but it was with sore distress—and they at last retired to their beds. "You had better sleep with me to-night, my dear bairn," but Lucy said she would rather lie in her mother's bed, as she had done since they went away—and that Aunt Isobel need not come to her during the night, unless she called upon her—so by the dim summer light each

went to her own room. But no sooner was every thing still in Aunt Isobel's room, than Lucy, who had never undressed herself, rose silently as a ghost, and taking a few garments in her basket, stole out of the house.

Truer than any maiden to the trysting hour was Lucy at the Linn; but there Edward Ellis was before her, and received the weeping girl with all the soothing fondness of a brother. "Oh! now, the time has come, Mr Ellis, when you can prove, if you have any kindness for poor Lucy Forester. My mother is dying far away, and my blind father is at her death-bed. Ever good to us all have you been—and now I beseech you, in the name of the great merciful God, and the Son of God, that you will help me to get to the place where my parents are, far off although it be, mair, indeed they say, than a hundred miles." Edward stood in amazement and said nothing. "Oh! Sir! if your ain father were dying, you would na' lang be here, and puir ignorant creature as I am, you cannot love your parents better than do I mine—so, tell me—tell me how to get to England, and I will pray for you to heaven morning and night as long as I am in life." And Lucy dropped upon her knees, and held up to him her clasped hands in an agony of supplication.

Edward Ellis tried to raise her gently from her kneeling posture, but Lucy seemed rooted to the ground. Then lifting her eyes to heaven, she said with a calmer and clearer voice,—"O Thou that dwellest far above the moon and stars, take pity on me, and save my mo-

ther from death!" and in the hush of the great heavens, it seemed as if the child heard a merciful response given to her prayer.

"There will be no darkness to-night—Lucy—for to-day was the longest day in all the year—and the morning will soon come upon the moon and stars. Cheer up—my sweetest one—and brother and sister as we are, we two will travel southwards together through the openings between the hills." Away they went side by side over bank and brae; and Edward Ellis, who as a sportsman knew all the hill-country well, to the very English Border—determined to lead Lucy to the point where he knew, at a stated hour, a conveyance would be found for her to Penrith. No weariness affected her limbs—the passion of grief carried her lightly over the hags in the moss—over the stoney torrents—and the steep heathery hills—no more tired than a fawn feeding during the night hours—and at sunrise, many a clouded mountain lay between her and Bracken-Braes. She, poor fugitive, felt now that she had made her escape from Aunt Isobel, who never would have suffered her to go, and that she was indeed on the way to her dying mother. Even hope began to rise with the bright morning-light, and as her feet brushed yet unfaltering over the dews, she faintly smiled in the face of her guide, and in her gratitude to him, felt almost an assurance that her mother would yet recover.

They sat down together on the turf beside a hill-side spring—and Lucy needed no other refreshment than a

little of that purest water. But Edward left her for a few minutes, and running to a hut on the edge of a birk coppice, came back with some barley-bread. "You may rest yourself here—Lucy—for an hour or two, or even three—if you choose—for we shall even then be in good time at the inn, on the Great North Road, and I will not leave you till I see you in safe hands." Lucy put her trust in him, just as if he had been an angel whom she had seen come down from the sky—her plaid had been brought with her—the noble-hearted boy folded her up in it with gentle hands—and made her lie down by his side below the shadow of a grey mossy rock, that, like a canopy, covered a bed of smoothest herbage. Lucy, although she had not known it, was wearied with her flight of more than twenty long Scottish miles, and fell asleep with her hand laid in its innocence almost upon her benefactor's breast. Edward put aside the golden ringlets and kissed her forehead, and then he too fell into a slumber, but still conscious that his arm was over Lucy Forester.

In an hour or two Lucy awoke, and starting to her feet, looked round as in a dream. But the thought of her mother made all plain at once—over moss and muir they again pursued their journey—and in good time reached the place where their walk was to terminate. Lucy received her instructions from Edward, who knew, well—boy as he was—all the Lake-land, and she put his memorandum-book into her bosom. "I will get back to the Manse before night—Lucy—if I should

have to hire a horse out of the work-field—what will the good people at Holylee and Bracken-Braes be thinking has become of us?"—"I left a slip of paper in Aunt Isobel's Bible, telling what I intended to do, and begging her forgiveness—and there she would be sure to find it at six o'clock this morning."

No less magnificent a vehicle than his Majesty's mail now drove up in style, and while the horses were baiting, Edward Ellis looked in and beheld two persons asleep, and two half-awake. He opened the door—and without ceremony lifted Lucy up—but strong opposition was declared by the most pompous of the somnolent gentlemen, thus disturbed in his ideal world, by the intrusion of a human face like that of Lucy Forester. An old-maidenish Lady, with a somewhat sour expression, seemed disposed to join the leader of the opposition, but first looking at Edward Ellis, and then at Lucy, her features relaxed into a benevolent smile, and she seemed willing to endeavour to make room for them both—a young man, in a naval uniform, stopt the fat whig's mouth with a harmless nautical oath—and Edward Ellis committed Lucy to his care. "Aye—aye—young gentleman—I will see her safe to harbour—whether sister or sweetheart." Edward knew Lucy was safe—and had just time to shake hands with the tar who bore bravery and kindness in his weather-beaten countenance, when the guard sounded his bugle, and off flew Lucy Forester of Bracken-Braes, in a carriage drawn by four blood-horses.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lucy had been committed to the charge of a man who would have gone through fire and water—nay, who had done so—nor thought anything of danger—to save the life of a human creature in jeopardy. Mr Marshall was a Lieutenant in the Navy, and his ship having come into Leith Harbour, for repair of damages sustained in a gale in the North-Seas, he had taken the opportunity of wheeling off for a week to his father's house on the banks of Ullswater. He soon heard poor Lucy's story, and having learned the value of home-feelings on the great deep, he felt the strongest compassion for his pretty little friend, and did all he could to assuage her affliction. Lucy felt as if the whole world were kind to her, and allowed herself to believe in the offered comfort. In a few hours she could even listen with interest to Mr Marshall's stories about the sea, and once or twice almost joined in the laughter of the other passengers, when the jolly tar became amusing in his anecdotes. Old maids do not in general stand high in public estimation, on the

score either of urbanity or tender-heartedness ; but this may be a popular delusion, and certainly, in the present case, Lucy had good cause to love the sisterhood. For this elderly Preston Spinstress was as tender towards her as if she herself had been the happy mother of many children, and on parting with her at Penrith, late in the evening, when Lucy was to leave the coach, gave her the present of an English Prayer-book, inscribed hastily with both their names.—" Lætitia Bairstow to Lucy Forester, God have her always in his holy keeping."

Lucy showed Mr Marshall the instructions she had received from Edward Ellis. " All right—all right, my bonnie lassie, but you are not afraid, are you, to trust yourself with me?"—" No, Sir, I will trust myself entirely to so good a man. You know where I am going, and from where I have come.—Oh! Sir, you ken that my heart is fu' o' grief, and that I want sair to see my mother—can you contrive to send me on to Ellesmere, and my father will be sure to pay the expence, for I came awa' without siller, and neither did Mr Ellis remember." The Lieutenant put his hand kindly on her shoulder, and Lucy was silent. In a couple of hours, Lucy Forester found herself in Seathwaite-Hall, an old mansion on the banks of Ullswater, in a drawing-room, surrounded by young ladies, who after embracing joyfully their gallant brother, bestowed their wondering and admiring kindness upon his beautiful charge. It was late in the night, and except those

three hours slumber by the spring on the hill-side in Scotland, Lucy had had no sleep since the early morn of yesterday. She was conducted to the prettiest bed in the prettiest room she had ever seen, by a young lady only a little older than herself, and who kissed her on saying good-night; and before Lieutenant Marshall had been able to satisfy the curiosity of his sisters about the beautiful Scottish maiden, Lucy was in a profound sleep.

Nature had given Lucy Forester into the arms of sleep, but all the while the child lay dreaming, there was a resolution kept mysteriously within her heart, that she would awake at sunrise. For her filial sorrow was not dead in that slumber, and it awoke her like a little knell at the time her heart had fixed. She opened the shutter, and looked timidly out upon a broad bright bay that glittered in the sunlight, shaded from the opposite shore by a grove of huge forest-trees. Lucy thought herself in another world. Several men were standing beside a boat, the first she had ever seen, except in pictures—and there was Lieutenant Marshall, whose loud cheerful laugh was heard from the water-side. As she stood considering how she could join the party, the pretty creature, who had taken her to the bed-room last night, came in dressed almost as plainly as herself, and conducted her to the parlour. Breakfast over, Agatha Marshall accompanied her down to the lake-side, and leapt into the pinnace. Lucy followed in wonder, but she saw the Lieutenant

at the helm—the snow-white sail was hoisted and unfurled, and a breeze coming with a rustle down Glencoin, away went the Naiad of Ullswater, and before a word was spoken, had rounded the green point of the bay, and was out of sight of her anchorage.

Agatha held Lucy by the hand, and as the Naiad stooped her gunwale in the wreathed foam that flowed like a waterfall away from her prow, told her with a smile not to be afraid. Friends of an hour—there they sat like sisters that had lived together from their birth. Lucy, oppressed as her heart was, and sorely troubled, could not help seeing, with the stealing delight of wonder, the wooded cliffs that seemed to shoot across the water and block up their way, and then slowly to recede, leaving nothing but the merry multitude of waves. Were these rocks, she thought, or were they old castles and churches hidden among the trees or the clouds? But Lucy would then close her eyes, for she felt them filling with tears, as she figured to herself the bed, where her blind father might be standing to witness her mother die. "Let go the main-sheet," cried the Lieutenant, and, after a moment's bustle, they were all standing in a green meadow, beside a bank of willows. "You are now at Patterdale, Lucy, and here I and Agatha must bid you farewell. It is not often I see the old gentleman, and I must not be away at the breakfast-table the first morning I am at home." Lucy would not hear of a guide. Mr Marshall knew there was no fear of her missing the way over Kirk-

stone; the day was fine, so away danced the homeward-bound Naiad, with Agatha waving a signal from the stern; and Lucy, after gazing a little while, turned her towards the great mountains.

Lucy had never been one moment utterly alone since she heard of her mother's illness. But now, in a short time, there was no human being near her in the solitude. House after house had disappeared, and now there was nothing but rocks and sky. These were not like the hills about Bracken-Braes—and the child felt awed in the desert. She sat down on the ledge of a bridge across a small rivulet that crossed that wild road, and opened the book given to her by that unknown lady. "God have her always in his holy keeping—" she lifted her eyes from these words, and saw the lambs running races upon the scanty green-plats among the rocks—the air was filled with murmuring insects, and a little bright bird, of a kind she had never seen before, kept playing his pretty gambols on the very ledge where she was sitting, as if for her amusement, and then began to trim his yellow and crimson plumage. Every creature seemed happy, and why might not she at least hope? She read over and over again all Edward Ellis's kind instructions, and hoped that God would bless him all the days of his life.

The young pilgrim was just about to rise and pursue her journey up the toilsome mountain, when two or three big drops of rain fell on the blue-slate coping of the bridge, and the dust of the road seemed in an

instant sultrier. That narrow desert place was darkened between its fearful r . ' s, and she knew, from the sudden grimness of the heaven, that there was going to be a thunder-storm. Ever since that fatal day in the Hirst-wood, her heart had quaked at the most distant growl of the element.

A number of large stones confusedly hanging over each other, afforded various places of shelter, and Lucy, to avoid the rain that now came down in torrents, and to lose sight of the flashes, crept into one of them, and endeavoured to hide herself from the thunder. There she lay with a quaking heart, while sometimes the thunder-crash seemed to shake the pillars of her prison. Looking out with a hurried glance, during a cessation of the peals, she saw the tall figure of a man indistinctly moving through the mist, and the sight of a human being in that awful solitude, brought her out from her concealment. Pale and speechless, and trembling with fear, and the coldness of that wet dungeon, Lucy stood before him in the attitude of a suppliant. In a little while she told her story; and the old shepherd, who had been descending into Patterdale, turned back, and said he would see her safe into the vale of Ambleside. The hurricane still continued, but Lucy forgot all her fears, for the shepherd wore a calm and cheerful countenance, and told her, that in an hour at farthest all would be peace and sunshine. He had heard, too, of the Scotch people at the Vicarage of Ellesmere, and assured Lucy that her mother must have

been alive the night before, as he had been in a house in that vale, and had heard the family talking of her illness. At these words Lucy heard not the dying voice of the thunder, nor observed the water-courses that were traversing the road down that mountain-pass. She kept close to the side of the old grave shepherd, whose words were few, but every one of which sounded sweeter than any music. "Noo, my li'le lass, that's Ammleside, ye canna ga wrang, so God be wi' you, and may ye find your puir mother in life."

Lucy was once more alone, but her guide had left her with a strengthened heart, and in a place where it was not possible to be very melancholy. For the short summer-storm was over and gone, and the valley below her literally swam in light, as the sun, no longer obscured by the black clouds that were fading in every direction, illuminated the woods and meadows, and the winding waters of the Rothay. The blue roofs of the village, embowered in trees, sent a cheerful feeling into Lucy's heart as she past by the gate of a building, which, with its dialled tower, she knew to be a church, and crowds of haymakers seen returning into every field after the rain, made her at once forget the solitary region, where she had been overtaken in the storm. There was no danger of losing her way now, and, with almost a spirit of cheerfulness, Lucy dropt like a bird into the Valley of Ambleside.

CHAPTER XXIV.

There had been a thunder-storm for several hours among the mountains of Coniston and Langdale, where the clouds lay heaviest and blackest, and now it had reached Ellesmere, and was raging above the Vicarage. The windows of the room in which Agnes lay in her fever had been left open, behind the half-closed shutters, that a wandering breath of air might haply come down from some one of the little glens, to relieve the oppressive sultriness of the atmosphere. As the thunder went rattling over the roof, and the flashes of lightning gleamed across the darkened room, Agnes was wholly insensible to the strife, and although not asleep, returned no answer to the kind words of inquiry which now and then the watchers by her bedside ventured to whisper in their anxiety. In the intervals of silence, the many mountain torrents were heard sounding on all sides, for there had been a deluge of rain at their sources, and every hillside showed a number of cataracts. Michael Forester heard none of these sounds. His wife's hand was

between both of his—and while at one time he seemed to be counting the pulses—at another he listened to her breathing, as if life or death were in each successive sigh. He was terrified lest those fitful pantings should all at once be mute, and for ever. So long as he heard that breath—to him all the outward tumult was as silence.

The Vicar, and indeed the whole family, had nearly given up all hope of Mrs Forester's recovery. A fatal crisis seemed to be at hand; and as if each person read in the other's eyes, an intimation that they ought all to leave the room, one by one they began to do so, and at last none were left there with the dying person but Mr Ianson and her husband. The family collected themselves together in the large room below, and there they sat, not without sobbing and tears, fearing every moment to see Mr Ianson coming down stairs, with a countenance telling that all was over. And thus they had sat nearly an hour,—the storm was hushed—and sunshine was again struggling through the gloom, and finding its way through the lead-latticed window to the floor of the room where they had been sitting so dark and silent. The swallows were beginning to twitter without—and nature slowly to reassume her customary cheerfulness and tranquillity. The door opened—and a stranger girl, stepping timidly across the floor, asked eagerly, "Is this Mr Colinson's, the Vicar of Ellesmere? O Sir, I am the daughter of Michael

Forester and Agnes Hay, and my name is Lucy. Is my mother in the land o' the living?"

Many kind tongues, and eyes, and hands, were soon comforting the dutiful daughter; but Lucy heard nothing but that her mother was not dead. "Oh! surely you are not deceiving me—and yet why are you all weeping so? Where is my father—perhaps he too is gone—and God's judgments more terrible than I can bear? Here am I, a' the way frae Scotland, come to pray by my mother's bedside—and God has brought me here unharmed, by means o' the kind hands o' my fellow creatures, who all helped me on towards this house, so far away from Bracken-Braes where we live! Oh! my bonnie lassie, tell me—tell me—if my mother is indeed likely to live!" Ruth Colinson felt her own hopes strengthened by the passionate earnestness of this appeal, and said with a faint smile to Lucy, that her mother had not been any worse since the morning, and that perhaps the danger might be past. Just then Mr Ianson came down stairs—and there was no fatal expression in his countenance—so Ruth once more assured her that there was hope. Then Lucy sat down and cried bitterly as if her heart would break.

At such a time there was no need of deception or concealment. None knew how God was dealing with her in the room above; but here was the creature dearest to her on this earth, brought to her bedside as by a prayer. So they led Lucy to the sick-room, and in a moment, with every sob hushed, she was on her knees

at her mother's bedside, with her forehead resting upon the hands of her father.

The mind of Agnes had been wandering for some time—and the fever had caused many afflicting dreams. "Poor Lucy! drowned in that black marl-pit—merciful God! see her—see her clinging to a branch! What can a blind father do to save his child—oh! what shrieks! what shrieks!" Michael turned his sightless countenance towards Mr Ianson, as if he looked for comfort. In the agony of his despair, he believed that in medical knowledge lay a foresight of futurity, and he felt as if even the issues of life and of death were committed to his mortal hands. "Oh! father—father—I your daughter, Lucy, am here—put your hand upon my head and know—my mother's face is not so changed as I thought—and she will live—will live—and go back with us, under the mercy of the Almighty, to Bracken-Braes." Michael Forester sat for a few moments mute and motionless—and then he, too, knelt down by the bedside of Agnes, and laid his cheek on Lucy's head, the touch of whose hair, wet as it was with the rains, and sorely dishevelled, was familiar to the yearnings of his inmost heart, and calmed in some measure the severity of his protracted passion.

Agnes started up in one of those sudden fits of disordered strength, that in a fever often come upon the apparent prostration of all vital power, and opening her eyes for the first time during twenty-four hours, fixed them upon Lucy, who by this time had risen from

her knees, and was standing by the bedside. Perhaps the sound of that voice had been recognized in the seeming deafness of her spirit. Ever and anon she averted, and then again cast her eyes, with a bewildered eagerness, upon her daughter—till at last she stretched forth her arms, and with a face expressing the most passionate fondness, but nothing else, drew Lucy to her bosom, and kissing her with a thousand kisses, fell back on her pillow. Lucy, in that embrace, had crept into the lowly bed, and there she lay by her mother's side—both mute—and to all who looked upon them beautiful as in the happiest sleep.

Now that Michael had been permitted to reflect on the wonderful appearance of Lucy at the Vicarage—and then had been told by Mr Colinson of the nature of her journey, he could not help feeling that the mother of such a child would be spared even for her sake. He had for several days and nights past thought of Lucy as an orphan. In his dreams he had seen her weeping in sore distress, and she would not be comforted. For in all his dreams, Michael saw still the objects of his affection;—and indeed there was no blindness in that imaginary world. Now God and God only had sent Lucy to restore her mother to life. "Impossible—impossible—that our child has been brought hither only to see her mother die! Hush—hush—they have both fallen asleep—and Agnes's breathing, methinks, is assuredly more free, and more composed."

"I am not asleep—father—but my mother is—and, oh! I beseech you all—here let me lie till she awakes."

The fever in which her mother lay might be infectious, but Lucy never thought of that—nor perhaps did any one then present, for in such extremities, prudence is not known to love, and all fear is for the dying. Without any clearly understood reason for it, every heart now began to hope; the Vicar walked out into his orchard—Ruth looked after some little household duty with noiseless steps—and Mrs Colinson prepared some refreshment for Mr Ianson, who now appeared in the lower room, and said that there certainly seemed a decided change for the better in the condition of his patient. Michael Forester had followed him down stairs unperceived, and on hearing these words, not meant for his ear, but manifestly addressed to another, he felt as if lifted up out of the grave.

CHAPTER XXV.

Had the load of misery under which Michael Forester groaned been all at once removed, it is probable that his mind would have given way, and reason itself been overthrown. He had often meditated upon all other evils that might befal himself or Lucy, but the death of Agnes had never been suffered to steady itself before his imagination, as an event that might take place, and as soon as that horrid catastrophe was imminent, he abandoned himself with headlong passion to uttermost despair. But now he was told, and he believed it, that Agnes might recover—nay, was recovering—and his whole frame of mind and body was shaken as by a convulsion. He walked about the house and then into the open air, praying and clasping his hands, and sometimes when he thought himself unobserved, kneeling down and asking forgiveness of Heaven. All that night he continued to sit by her bedside, as he had done for several nights before, although he was assured that the crisis of the fever was past. Lucy had been removed into another room—but she

was in perfect health—and her father, contented with one single kiss of her closed eyes, seemed to forget that she was in the house, and sat like an image by his Agnes. Ruth Colinson, unknown to him, was in the room, for one or other of the family had been by that sick-bed all night long ever since Agnes had been swimming for her life. Voices were still low, and sad, and whispering—and all the ordinary occupations of the house carried on in silence. Michael longed to hear one cheerful tone—any sound like a laugh—any motion that might denote bustle or activity—for he still gave a rueful interpretation to every thing he discerned in his darkness, and shuddered lest the noiselessness of midnight might be a token of despair and death.

Another day and another night passed by, and Michael Forester knew that his Agnes was to be restored. Far was she from death now, according to the judgment of man, as on the afternoon she arrived at Ellesmere. Their usual gentle and steady light had returned to her eyes—the few words she was able in her weakness to utter were composed and happy—she recognized every one with a smile—and two or three quiet tears trickled down her pale cheeks when Michael told her the story of Lucy's departure and journey from Bracken-Braes. Michael and Agnes were now left much alone; and kind and skilful as Mr Ianson had been, what blessedness to know that his presence was no longer needed in their house! When he did come, it was only a visit of congratulation; and

Michael Forester was even able to enjoy his cheerful and jocular conversation—for Mr Ianson was something of a humorist, and had a store of anecdote, on which the club had drawn every Saturday night for several years, without any visible diminution of the charm of novelty. But in a few days the worthy Doctor discontinued even such visits as these—and Agnes, so far from being disturbed, enjoyed the life and animation that, somewhat restrained, were heard once more in every apartment of the Vicarage.

But the joy and gratitude of Lucy exhibited themselves in quite a different character. Hope and trust had entered into her young and innocent heart long before her father had dared to indulge them; and as soon as she was told by Mr Ianson that her mother was out of danger, a very flood of rapture overflowed her whole spirit. She tried to keep down her joy—she gazed on her mother's sunk cheeks, and wept—she went by herself into the room, or along with Ruth Colinson, and kneeling down, poured forth the most beautiful extemporaneous thanksgivings—she opened the Bible, and read portions of our Saviour's history—his miracles and crucifixion. She put her arms round Ruth Colinson's neck and kissed her, for Ruth had comforted her day and night—and then going into the fields or orchard with that affectionate girl, she bounded along in her glee; or for an hour joined in the work of the haymakers now housing the produce of the latest enclosure on the hillside. If there were a flower on bank or in hedge-

row, Lucy's eyes were sure to detect it; and she formed a small garland, whose sweet smell, she said, would restore her mother, for, "methinks, Ruth, that your English flowers have a finer odour than even those at Bracken-Braes, and I must confess that they are richer in their beautiful colours—for here there is mair shelter—aye, it is lowner far than at Holylee."

There had been one Sabbath only since Lucy's arrival at the Vicarage, and that was not a day on which it was possible for the afflicted girl to go to the Chapel. But she now took Ruth's arm, who leaned on her brother Miles, and they proceeded to the place of worship. For a while Lucy heard the bell tinkling, but where she knew not; for still at every turning of the path, as they ascended or descended, the sound seemed to come from a different spot. Then the head of the glen, which they had now reached, was quite filled with little wooded eminences, some almost entirely rock, and others partly pasturage, rent obviously by some natural convulsion from the sides of the mountains. Between these eminences lay patches of meadow-ground watered by almost invisible runlets proceeding from springs, or from the main stream that wound its increasing way down towards the Vicarage, and finally into Windermere. Here Lucy recognized woodmen's huts such as she had known in the Hirst-Wood, but no other habitation. Well dressed people, however, were issuing from all the coppices—and the bell sounding close at hand, she lifted her eyes in that direction, and there

was the beautiful low-roofed Chapel of Ellesmere, with its white tower, and church-yard encircled with the murmur of that mountain torrent. As the bell ceased to tinkle, the cry of the kite was heard in the hollow heavens.

Lucy had never been in any public place of worship but the Kirk of Holylee. All that she now saw and heard was in form very different—but in spirit the same. This small rural congregation had an organ whose music sounded sweetly and solemnly in that lonesome chapel. The psalm-tunes were not the same Lucy had been accustomed to, but her fine ear taught her at once to accompany Ruth, and with a low and somewhat hesitating voice, she joined in those beautiful hymns. Before the worship was half over, Lucy gave to it the whole religion of her heart. She thought of her mother rescued from death—of her father sitting at that hour by her bedside—of God's mercies to her a helpless child, and of the kindness experienced from her fellow Christians at the Vicarage—and with a fervent voice did the pious creature repeat every response throughout the service.

An Annual Festival was now at hand, called the Rush-bearing, for which all the maidens in the parish about Lucy and Ruth's age, and indeed much younger, had been making preparations. The origin of this rite, evidently of a religious nature, is not distinctly known, but its celebration is with good reason supposed to be a thanksgiving for the hay-harvest. It takes place in

most districts of Westmoreland near the end of July, when the hay-fields are beginning to get green again with the after-grass, and a season almost of comparative inactivity intervenes between it and the first week of September, when the corn-fields are yellow for the sickle. Being a sacred institution, the Rush-bearing, beautiful sight as it is, partakes of a somewhat solemn character, and although no prayers are said, no hymns are sung, but all is silent, and the very meaning of the rite obscure, yet at its close nothing like amusement or recreation occurs, nothing to break the spirit of a ceremonial which piously regards the gratitude of the creature, and the bounty of the Creator.

In the parish of Ellesmere, the Rush-bearing had, from time immemorial, been observed with more than ordinary attention. The good Vicar, which is not usual in other places, always took upon himself the arrangement of the procession. The children all met at the Vicarage, each provided with her flower-garland, dressed in white, and adorned with ribbands, whose colours gay, and sometimes even garish, were notwithstanding pleasant to behold in that infant band. Nothing whatever was worn on the head, but every ringlet flowed free and unconfined. Ranked according to their height, the innocent creatures walked two by two, with the flower-garlands in their hands—and thus the procession moved silent as a dream towards the solitary Chapel. Lucy and her cousin Martha walked side by side, and it was upon this day that they might be said to have

begun to love one another with a sisterly affection. Every heart was happy, it knew not why, for every child that walked in that fair array felt the beauty of that whole of which itself made part; and one spirit of harmonious feeling pervaded the living chain, from the two leading maidens now on the verge of womanhood, to the last two small creatures of five summers, who were often scarcely able to keep up with the slow pace of the Procession. The birds kept flying from bough to bough as the Rush-bearing past through the coppice-woods, and in every quiet pasture the lambs frisked among their knolls. The Chapel-door was open, and in went the quiet sisterhood to deposit their flower-garlands on the pews, the pulpit, and the altar.

In a few minutes, the interior of the Chapel, which with its dark oak furniture, stained walls, and low raftered roof, was perhaps somewhat gloomy, glowed with a thousand bright and gorgeous colours. Many of the garlands had been framed with much taste of garden-flowers both rich and rare; but indeed it is not possible to join together a multitude of blossoms, and buds, and flowers, and leaves, without the aggregate being most beautiful. The Rush-bearers themselves, a name originating in another custom now disused, could not help eyeing, with delighted wonder, the splendid show of their distributed garlands—and then arranged as before, they reverently left the Chapel, and hand in hand returned to the Vicarage.

There, beneath the solemn shadow of that ancient

Yew-tree, the Vicar's wife had set out tables of simple viands, the same tables at which the merry haymakers had taken their meals. The Vicar blessed the bread and fruit—and when the repast was over, some of the elder maidens sung a hymn. Ruth Colinson whispered to her father, that Lucy would sing one of the psalms used in the Kirk at Holylee, and a leaf would have been heard to fall while she warbled,

> "Plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name."

The sun was setting in all his glory—and Agnes, who was now strong enough sometimes to leave her bed, had been for a short time sitting at the window, of which Michael ventured to open a few panes, just as Lucy began to sing by herself,

> "The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
> He makes me down to lie
> In pastures green, he leadeth me
> The quiet waters by."

CHAPTER XXVI.



There was now entire happiness within the Vicarage of Ellesmere, for all the shadows of death had disappeared, and Agnes, who had lain so long wasted and delirious in hopeless disease, had risen up in her pale returning beauty, and had walked about the shaded pastures, both in the morning and evening light. A deep religious gratitude gave a still more delightful character to those eyes that never smiled without inspiring affection, and the awe left by the consciousness of the peril from which she had been providentially saved, breathed a mournful composure over a deportment that was at all times naturally sedate, making even the tones of her speech sweeter and more gentle. Her husband had not wholly recovered his usual undisturbed demeanour, yet every thing he said or did expressed to Mr Colinson repentance for that passion of grief that had so utterly overwhelmed him, and showed that, on another trial, his heart would probably be more humble and obedient. But where was Lucy in her joy? Tell how the linnet in spring passes every hour

in its vale of sunshine. In the grey dawn, before the yellow sunlight tinged the diadem of the Elm-grove, or melted the veil of diamonds that lay over the dewy sward, before the thrush had fed her brood, or the young swallows looked out from their nests below the antique cornice, while yet the kine were reposing, and the hare sitting fearless at a distance from his shelter, Lucy was out in the morning solitude, and forgetting her happiest dreams in the still and shaded loveliness that was gradually brightening over heaven and earth. Sometimes, even before Ruth Colinson was awake, had Lucy been by herself all the way to the Chapel, and received kind words from the shepherds going to the mountains. The long day glided by, she knew not how, in various delights, and often did she wonder, on looking at the sky, to see that the sun was indeed setting among his golden clouds. And was Bracken-Braes forgotten? The green broomy hills and treeless banks of Heriot Water—that one wooded Linn—the Howlet's-Nest—and he, whom her heart had so often beat within her inmost bosom to meet there, Edward Ellis? No—no, all Lucy's affections were true to the place of her birth, and sad although she certainly would be when the day came, now near at hand, that they must take their departure from Ellesmere, yet her heart yearned, at the forethought, towards sweet Scotland, and there among the banks and braes where she was born, might she also live, die, and be buried.

But this is the morning of the most beautiful Festi-

val that cheers the Land of Lakes, Windermere Regatta—and Miles Colinson, with Lucy and Ruth, will join in his pinnace that Mediterranean fleet. As for Martha, she showed her good sense and her good feeling in preferring to accompany the old people from whom she was about so soon to part; and Alexander Ainslie, who had become a prodigious favourite at the Vicarage, attended the nymphs of the household in his Scotch bonnet, which he wore with an air of pride, as if the object of universal observation. So bound to the Vicarage by love and by fear had been the heart of the affectionate Lucy ever since her arrival from Scotland, that she had never once left the vale of Ellesmere; the Chapel, and the rocks around it having been the boundary of her rambles. One glance of Windermere was all that she had taken on that troubled day, when she was flying to her mother, and its beauty was like a dim dream to her imagination. But now the party winded joyously up the wooded hills, and below the precipices that intervened between secluded Ellesmere and the Queen of the Lakes; and Lucy promised not to turn her eyes from the scenery immediately around her, till Miles Colinson had conducted her to a natural watch-tower at High-Wray, built of rocks that no lever could have stirred, and with a flight of steps that had been hung in air by an earthquake. Miles Colinson then took his gentle hand from Lucy's forehead, while he and Ruth watched the expression of her countenance as Windermere burst upon her view,—water,

woods, air, and sky all blended together in beautiful and magnificent repose.

The simple creature had never known any other world than that of Holylee. That pastoral parish was to her the image of the whole earth. After reading to her father about other countries, all thought of them was laid aside with the book, and she saw and heard only the scenery of her native vale. But now Lucy felt herself in heaven—no dream, but a reality enduring in its delight. The bliss of novelty, beyond all doubt or comparison, of every bliss that the human soul can know, the most vivid, luminous, and dazzling, now possessed her whole being as she gazed and gazed; a capacity of happiness adequate to the beauty for the first time revealed, suddenly unfolded itself within her nature, and in the midst of her wildered and exulting happiness, she wept to know that her mother had been saved from death, and that the Great Being who stretched out the heavens and the earth, had looked with an eye of mercy on her sick-bed, had hearkened to the prayers of her a poor little child, and on his throne had guarded the footsteps of her blind father. "Oh! Ruth—Ruth, this is by far the happiest day of all my life, and I will think of it, dream of it every day and every night, as long as I live, when I am far far away in Scotland." But Ruth took her hand, without any reply, and bounding together down the mossy steps, scattering the wild rose-leaves, but without startling the red-breast from its nest, and then along the sloping hay-fields and old

flowery leas, the two happy creatures stood breathless on a little pier that jutted into a bay, and there saluted Miles, whom they had absolutely outrun, with a laugh of raillery, as he handed them tripping into the boat, and then, with vigorous arm, made the Antelope of Ellesmere glide with her broken shadow under rock, and along level shore, till she reached the middle of the Lake, and pointed her prow towards the place of rendezvous, Lowood-Bay, with its few sentinel pine-trees, and wooded mountain with all its peaceful battlements.

Lucy remembered her voyage up Ullswater, but the wind had wafted the Naiad so swiftly along, that she scarcely knew where she was, till again standing on the shore. Grief and fear too had blinded and deafened her to the beauty of that morning. But now life and joy were one. The heaven smiled over her head, and as she looked down, there also were the heavens, whenever the oars rested, and the pinnace, with its gaudy flag yet unfolded, floated with almost imperceptible motion on the air-like water. But for the little bells that went wavering in myriads past the gunwale, and showed that they were on another element, Lucy could have thought herself sailing through the very skies, and a sort of pleasing fear subdued her gladness, when once more the Antelope resumed her flight, and brought them within hearing of the merry music, becoming every moment more clear and distinct from Lowood-Bay. "Aye, there's the Bowness band!" exclaimed

Ruth; "how sweet, Lucy, is the sound of the clarionet and bugle, and does not the hollow sound of the great drum fill the whole lake from Ecclerig-Crag to Water-Head?"

Just behind a low pastoral point, that running out from a coppice-wood, formed one of the horns of a small bay, that to the careless eye was not observed to be a bay at all, but thought to be merely part of the straight shore, was anchored in shallow water, and within leap of the silver sanded beach, the Antelope of Ellesmere. From that station there was not only a view of Lowood-Bay, distant a few hundred yards, but of the Lake down to Belle-Isle, and across to the undisturbed waters of Pool-wyke, that seemed a lake of themselves, and almost separated in their still seclusion, from the spirit of festivity now breaking out all along the opposite shore. Like Apparitions rising up from the depths of the Lake, for whence they came Lucy knew not nor could conjecture, many a gaily painted pinnace now moved twinkling over the broad bosom of Windermere, and the echoes answered to shouts and laughter from the merry crews striving in amicable contest. Lucy started to her feet at the first signal gun, which she thought close to their anchorage; and the little carronade having been placed on a spot commanding a multitudinous echo, it seemed as if, on that cloudless sky, peals of thunder were rolling round the whole circle of mountains, and more than once re-awakening, when all thought them over, died faint and afar

off, beyond the blue skies of Langdale-Pikes, a mountain that, look where you will, still forms part of the scenery of Windermere.

Not one lazy straggler was now seen out upon the Lake, but the whole tiny Fleet was moored around the bay, a bright and gorgeous circle of flags and awnings. The rowing boats now started for the prize, and all was animation and enthusiasm. But Lucy was told to look away from the race, towards Calgarth and Millar-ground, for the sea had sent its southern breezes, and the Sail-boats, that had lain all morning becalmed in the bay of Bowness, now loomed on the horizon, and stooping beneath the winds that they were bringing along with them to the stillness of the airless water of Lowood, soon showed the various splendour of their array, and proudly imparted another character to the whole Festival. "There goes the flying Schooner, the Victory," said Miles Colinson, an enthusiastic and skilful fresh-water sailor; "and that is the Endeavour with its long white pendant, close upon her stern, standing on the same tack; they are going nearly before the wind now, and methinks the Endeavour is about to run foul of the boom of her main-sail—but we shall see before evening which eats the other out of the wind, when close-hauled, and in the wind's eye, weathering Seymour-Crag. —Look, Lucy, are they not beautiful?" Beautiful, indeed, they appeared to her eyes, but their beauty was as that of living creatures, and their motion as that of life, while with wings white as snow, and meteors at-

tending their course, they held their undeviating progress towards the mountains, and apparently without any guidance, but that of their own spirit, went gliding by the hanging groves and woods. "Auld Lang Syne, as I live," exclaimed Lucy! and, as the cloud of sail carried away that melancholy music, the Scotch maiden was, for a moment, at Bracken-Braes, sitting beneath the Plane-Tree, and the Heriot Water murmuring along the willow-haugh, down to the Linn and the Manse of Holylee.

Apart from the bay and all its beautiful confusion, yet near enough to enter into the spirit of the Festival, the crew of the Antelope remained with her, during all the boat-races, at their quiet anchorage. But Miles Colinson now weighed anchor, and Lucy took her seat at the stern, while Ruth relieved the flag from its staff, proud of the emblazoning which their joint needle-work had formed during the long evenings below the Yew-Tree. "We must take our place in the Grand Aquatic Procession," said Miles with a smile, "but I must take care not to run down the Nil Timeo, the ten-oared Barge of the Windermere Sailing-Club." Much brandishing and splashing of oars there was before both lines were formed, and the "Grand Aquatic Procession" moved in the sunshine over the dark blue waters, as if some doughty Doge were about to wed the Lady of the Lake. The crew of each boat doubtless thought her the brightest star in that moving constellation, and so occupied were all the rowers and their companies with their nice

and difficult duties, that it was only now and then that the Sail-boats attracted notice, when bearing down, with a freshened breeze, upon the Procession returning to its anchorage in the form of a crescent, they tacked suddenly, just when about to break the line, and bore away majestically before the wind, with their bands playing Rule Britannia, or God Save the King.

"Ruth—Ruth," exclaimed Lucy, "there is bonny Agatha Marshall who was so kind to me at her father's house on the banks of that other Lake," and the two boats were now so close together that Lucy and Agatha shook hands across their gunwales, and then again in a moment were separated by an oar length of foamy water. By this time Lucy had become quite a bold sailor, and taking off her bonnet, that she might behold the spectacle on all sides, down fell her clustering ringlets in a shower of sunbeams over her cheeks and neck, and never had the Cambridge scholar beheld in imagination so bright a figure of an Hour, a Grace, or a Nereid, as that fair Scottish shepherdess now gazing on him with smiles of bewildered happiness. Like an Hour, too, she was to pass away—and although unforgotten—yet to return never—never more. But the horns of the crescent had touched Lowood-Bay—a hundred oars rose into the air—the boats were again anchored or drawn up to the beach—the whole fleet deserted by their crews, and the shores alive from the water-edge to the knolls below the wooded Scaur where the hawks inhabit.

Lucy sought anxiously through the moving crowd for Agatha Marshall, and it was not long before they recognized each other. The Colinsons and Marshalls were not altogether strangers, and the two parties agreed to retire from the stir and bustle of the scene, and have a repast in some quiet glade within reach of the lake-breezes. Miles soon recollected a fit spot half way between Lowood and Ecclerig; and a crowd of remembrances came over Lucy's mind, when in a few minutes they sat down upon the bank of a charcoal-pit, within a wood that had been thinned that very spring—so perfectly like the Hirst-wood where her father lost his sight in that thunder-storm! Agatha, Lucy, and Ruth were all intimate friends in a few minutes—and Lucy's eyes beamed with joy to hear that the Lieutenant had been most prosperous in his late cruise, and was now quite a rich man. "They say we are to have peace soon—and then my brother will live with us at Seathwaite-Hall, and we shall get Regattas of our own on Ullswater; Lucy Forester will surely visit her friends again—and I do not despair of seeing her with us long before—I am married."

Mirth and merriment soon grew general, but never loud over that sylvan saloon. In an hour or two, the heron who had been disturbed by the unusual clamour, was seen returning from Rydal woods, with wings moving not quicker than oars, and his flight gradually descending nearer and nearer the water, as he kept approaching his nest on Rough-holm by the deserted

bay of Ray-rigg. The wind, too, was dying away, as the sun declined westwards; and here and there a boat with elderly people and children taking an early farewell of the revelries, crawled almost reluctantly homewards along the sleeping lake that was spread with deepening shadows. Independently of the umbrage of the forest-boughs, the air was cooler, although calmer, and the butterflies that had enjoyed that day of light had all settled down upon the wild-flowers. "Part we must not without some Scottish music," was the feeling of all the party—and Lucy, who never in all her life had been asked twice to do any thing she could do, warbled the wildest and most mournful spirit of the genius of her country. There were wet eyes during some of those airs; for worthy, indeed, were they of tears, sung as they now were by one to whom nature had taught the music of the heart, in whose sorrow innocence rejoices amidst the pauses of its gladness, and then returns more happy to its own living world. It seemed as she sung, that the composure of the soul within her almost sobered the golden gleam above her forehead, and touched with paleness the roses of her cheek. Fair moved the bosom of one not yet woman-grown, while those liquid murmurs left her lips apart in their beauty—and when at the close of the tune every tongue and eye applauded, Lucy soon recovered all her gladsome smiles, and lifted up from the sward eyes that looked as if they could express no other emotion than that of rejoicing happiness.

CHAPTER XXVII.



The stay of the Foresters at the Vicarage of Ellesmere had been protracted some time beyond the almost perfect recovery of Agnes, by mutual friendship of a very deep and endearing character. Distress and sympathy had opened up and exhibited the recesses of each other's hearts, and that two months' visit had made revelation of feelings which might have lain concealed during a whole life. But the day of parting had come at last. The Vicar, his wife, and his son and daughters, had accompanied their beloved guests as far as Seathwaite-Hall, on Ullswater, and the final farewell had thus been less melancholy than if it had taken place at the door of their own dwelling. Michael parted from a friend in Mr Colinson whom he held dearer than he supposed he could have done any new acquaintance at his time of life, when the heart is contented with affections of old standing, and is slow to expand itself fully under the power of any fresh attachment. The admirable character of the Vicar, one of the most modest, humble, and unassuming

of men, had betrayed itself unconsciously in many simple traits almost every day after their friendship was a week old; and Michael, who at first scarcely understood how to reconcile Mr Colinson's zeal in secular concerns with such a religious spirit as his sacred profession demanded, and wondered a little at his manual labours in the hay-field and the barn, ere long discerned, that the reconcilement of custom can, without moral injury, blend together pursuits elsewhere deemed repugnant, and acknowledged that the life of a good man ought not to be tried by any other test than the consistency of its own condition. In Scotland, Michael Forester was aware that no clergyman could engage personally in rural toils, almost like a hind, without loss of character, and implied degradation of mind. But in Ellesmère the spirit of the clerical life had for ages been of this homely and primitive kind. Even in dress, the Vicar, he was told by Agnes, was but little distinguished from the respectable householders around, and clad as he was throughout the week in grey, she confessed that she had never completely felt that he was a clergyman till the first Sabbath, when walking to the chapel, he appeared just like Mr Kennedy at Holylee, more dignified and impressive it might be from the contrast of his usual homeliness of dress and manner. But, in good truth, each member of the family at the Vicarage was alike estimable. Although far inferior both in mental and corporeal gifts to Agnes, yet Mrs Colinson was a woman without guile, and of a truly

Christian spirit. She had borne many afflictions that had never fallen to the lot of Agnes with unrepining resignation. No human being ever worshipped her Maker more in spirit and in truth than did she every Sabbath in that little chapel. Her charities were like the night-dews, felt not seen, and one good deed was by her forgotten in another, her whole life being past in a quiet succession of kindnesses towards her fellow-creatures. Ruth, her sole surviving daughter, was also the flower of all the flock, and allowed to be the sweetest and the prettiest girl in Ellesmere. And Miles, who had already distinguished himself at Cambridge, both in classical literature and science, reminded the elder statesmen in the neighbouring vales of his uncle Joshua Colinson, formerly Curate of Wansfell, whose fame as a mathematician and divine still survived in those obscure and remote places, whither he had retired in the prime of life, and where he had died in ignoble but useful retirement in a green old age. But the Foresters were far away from the Vicarage now—and had returned all safe and well to Bracken-Braes.

If tears had blinded Lucy's eyes as they stole a last glance of Ellesmere, it is not to be thought that they were dry when once more she beheld the spire of Helylee Kirk. As they passed the Manse her heart beat wildly, for there was Edward Ellis with a kindly smile and a voice of rejoicing salutation. Aunt Isobel was on the look-out for them below the Plane-Tree, and after the first weeping embrace was over, and all

had time to feel that the roof of Bracken-Braes was indeed over them once more, Michael gave thanks to the Almighty for bringing them all out of their late tribulation. Little or no change was visible in the rooms—as far as their faithful memory served, every thing was in its usual place—untouched, yet free from dust. The old clock, that had rest while Aunt Isobel sojourned in the Manse, now ticked with all its power—a few books lay on the broad wooden chimney-piece, and Lucy remembered the very passage she had been reading that day the letter came from Mr Colinson about her mother's illness—the barking glee of the two shepherd dogs was over; and the creatures sat each at its own side of the fire glad of the return—and there was the speckled-breasted mavis, in his cheerful prison, aware that it was Lucy's white hand that now ran its fingers along the wicker-bars. The seasons at Bracken-Braes were not so early as at Ellesmere. It was not above a week ago since the first swathe of grass had fallen before the scythe—"To-morrow," said William Laidlaw, "the rakers will be all in the Haugh, and I am mista'en if ye ha'e seen or heard o' a heavier crop in ony part of England."—"Stupid creatures," quoth Isobel, "not one o' you can speak a word o' English, ye ha'e a' the Scottish accent sae strong that it is just perfectly vulgar. Couldna the Vicar, as you call him, or his son, the student, have taught you a mair refined discourse? You'll be a' Episcopals, I doubt not—and what'll you think o' the kirk

o' Holylee in comparison with that chapel o' Ellesmere that Lucy wrote me so long a letter about, wi' its organ, and hymns, and printed prayers!" But Aunt Isobel now spoke to those who understood all her peculiar modes of speech, and knew how rightly to interpret its meanings. Every Sabbath had she, sitting in the kirk of Holylee, thought of them in the Chapel of Ellesmere, and whatever differences there might be in their forms of worship, and solemnly attached as she was to her own simple form of faith, deeply did she feel that wherever a few were gathered together in sincerity God would be in the midst of them, and mercifully, as he thought fitting, grant their prayers.

Aunt Isobel scrutinized Martha the orphan with kind but keen eyes, and asked and answered a hundred questions. She was much pleased with Martha's plain, quiet, and sensible manners, and declared that she would have known her to be her father's child had she met her at Japan. "Aye—aye—my good Martha, you have been a hard-working lassie, they tell me, and ha'e worked, too, a' your days for them that were not o' your ain blood. But you'll lead a different life, my bairn, at Bracken-Braes, and we'll a' use you as kindly as we do Lucy herself. Oh! Agnes, don't you see the very glint o' poor Abel's eye there—and there, too, the self-same dimples that showed themselves in ilka cheek whenever he laughed, which was often and often in the shortest day, for a merrier man than Abel Fo-

rester never sang at his work beneath Heaven's sunshine."

In a very few days Martha was quite at home at Bracken-Braes. She felt with gratitude that the kind promises that had been made to her before she left Westmoreland had been more than realized. At meals, at all their fireside work or leisure, at prayers, in bed, for she slept with Lucy, the once-neglected or oppressed orphan now felt herself taken within the affection of many excellent hearts, and gradually becoming familiar with thoughts and feelings of whose existence she had formerly known nothing, but that found out corresponding chords in her own nature. Pleased with herself, thankful to her Maker, ever day more and more attached to all the family, and naturally fond of work and averse to all idleness, Martha was soon thought quite a treasure—and her character began to stand high in the Parish. The hay-harvest went on apace, and Martha, although at first a little puzzled with the Scotch fashion, soon distinguished herself by her perseverance and activity. Jacob Mayne declared sae was worth her weight in gold, and held her up as a pattern to his own daughters, who, it must be confessed, were somewhat indolent, and afraid of the sun tanning their skin and hurting the delicacy of their complexion. Good-humour, contentment, and a willingness to do one's best, are prime qualities in the character of a cottage-girl; and although Martha was no beauty, yet they gave a pleasing expression to ordinary enough

features, and, except Lucy herself, no one at the close of the week was more admired in the Haugh.

Few states of life are more delightful than the calm and tranquil return into old dear familiar habits, even although they may have been interrupted by a change in itself perfectly happy. Michael's feet knew well all the ground about Bracken-Braes, and after the necessary confinement of a new kind of scenery at Ellesmere, he now felt an enlargement of mind in the greater freedom of motion in all his limbs; again the day was subdivided in a way that had long been habitual to him; and all the on-goings of his farm told him perpetually where the sun stood in Heaven. Once more, too, he had taken his place as an Elder below the Pulpit—Mr Kennedy's voice was even pleasanter to his ear than before —no disparagement to the reading of the good Vicar—and thoroughly as he had entered into the spirit of the service of the Church of England, yet to him the sanctifying power of years lay upon his own form of worship. Agnes had never hoped to see Bracken-Braes more, and to her it was dearer—more beautiful than ever—while Lucy, convincing herself, with many a sigh, that she must never hope to be at Ellesmere again, except in a dream, cherished the remembrance of all its loveliness, without losing any of her attachment to the sweet place of her nativity. Bare, naked, and bleak it was, no doubt, in comparison with that English valley; but in spring and in summer what place, in its own way, could be more beautiful than the Vale of the Heriot-Water, all the way down from Ladyside to Holylee?

CHAPTER XXVIII.



THERE were two causes of distress to Lucy soon after her return from Westmoreland; her two dearest friends—the highest and the lowest—Emma Cranstoun of the Hirst, and Mary Morrison of Ewebank, were both ill in health and distressed in spirit. Mary had only once been over at Bracken-Braes for a single hour, and Lucy had but once visited her in return. Both times the poor creature's eyes had seemed red with weeping, and when a smile crossed her face, it was more woful than any other expression. She fixed her eyes on Lucy's as if she had some secret to reveal and confide to her affection; but then would turn away in ghastly silence, and even cover her face with her hands, or for a while disappear. Lucy knew that she had a harsh father, but there seemed now about Mary Morrison a deeper distress than could arise from that cause, which had always existed the same—and Mary herself said, "I canna speak—I darena speak—but my heart is broken—Lucy—and before winter I may be in my grave—and my soul called to judgment." Lucy breath-

ed not a word to her parents or Aunt Isobel of Mary's melancholy state of mind; but determined to persuade her friend, whom she loved more tenderly than ever, to tell her what secret misery was preying upon her life.

On her first visit to the Hirst, at the earnest request of the Lady herself, Lucy was if possible even more distressed by her appearance than by that of Mary Morrison. Emma Cranstoun, who only a few weeks ago leapt so lightsomely from her palfrey at the cottage-doors, was lying on a couch so faint and languid that she did not rise up on Lucy's entrance into the room, but stretched out her hand, which felt hot and feverish as Lucy kissed it with tears of affection. "My old malady has come back, my friend, and I fear it must be called a consumption. Yet I am not in that cheerful frame of mind which it is said consumptive persons go with to the very grave. No—my sweet Lucy—my heart is disquieted within me, and I fear to die. Much have I longed for your return—yet now that I see you, I am too weak both in mind and body to enjoy your presence as I always used to do. But sit still, do not go away."

Lucy Forester loved Mary Morrison, as two innocent and humble creatures love each other, in equal condition of lowliness. But with her love for the Lady of the Hirst was blended that admiration—that reverence with which a guileless child of poor estate will naturally regard a high-born and beautiful benefactress. From her father's cottage had she come with all humi-

lity into the drawing-room of that old Hall. Surrounded with all the elegancies—even splendours of rank, little as she was known to value them, now lay with a deep hectic flush on her cheeks, and with eyes of a brilliancy that pained Lucy's heart she knew not why, the Lady whom all the country loved. For Mary Morrison, Lucy would have watched night after night—for her would she fearlessly have walked over mountains and moors in the frost and snow of winter midnights. But for the Lady of the Hirst, she felt that she was ready to die on a moment's warning—willing to leave father, and mother, and all, so that she might purchase life for Emma Cranstoun. That one so good, so pure, so beautiful beyond compare, so charitable, and so religious, and so far superior in all her looks, words, and motions to every body else she had ever seen—that such a being should die—was a thought too dreadful to be endured—even although Lucy well knew that, were it to be so, it would be an instant change from earth to Heaven.

"Lucy—I have more comfort in your presence even than in Mr Kennedy's, excellent Christian as he is, and kind to me as if I were his own daughter. Oh! sweet! heavenly sweet were the sounds of that psalm the first evening I ever was at Bracken-Braes! I must get you to sing it to me on my death-bed." Lucy laid her head on the couch and wept—but suddenly a cheering comfort came, she knew not whence, into her heart. "I will sing to you every psalm—

every hymn I know—but not on your death-bed, Lady—for you will recover and ride about the braes as you used to do, blessing the houses of the poor!"—"Read these letters—Lucy—and tell me what you think—remember the eye of God is at all times on his creatures, and speak the truth."

Little did Lucy Forester know of this world—little of its awful or its mean mysteries—but these miserable letters altogether shocked and baffled her reason. In them the weak or wicked writer told Emma Cranstoun that she was assuredly dying—that her mother and sisters had all died of consumption, which was hereditary in the family—that Mr Kennedy knew nothing of the spirit of the Gospel promises—and that she ought to call in to the aid of her soul some very different Minister of Christ, before it was too late, for that after death cometh judgment! Lucy felt an indescribable horror of such a cruel and merciless communication,—and weak and ignorant child as she was, there was a power in her unperverted conscience that appealed, in a few simple words, to the quaking heart of her benefactress. "Oh! best of all ladies that ever brought the blessing of their presence across the threshold of the poor, what sins and iniquities can you have to repent of—what evil thought did your bosom ever conceive—what evil word did your lips ever utter—what evil deed did your hands ever perform? Can my father, and my mother, and Mr Kennedy, and all the rest of the people in the parish, be in the wrong, who all bless your name, and

count them happy days since you came to live at the Hirst? No doubt we are all frail—all fallen—all corrupt. The Bible tells us that—but the Bible tells us that there is a Saviour, and if you will let me, I will read you some chapters that will set your heart at rest."

Who may be a wiser interpreter of many of the doctrines of Christianity than an innocent and guileless maiden, who has been brought up at the knee of a father, whom religion had reconciled to a sore distress? May such a one not explain the spirit of those passages, whose celestial beauty has brought heaven upon her midnight dreams? Meanings perhaps too fine and pure for the comprehension of strongest minds, polluted or deadened by worldly pursuits, may become familiarly known to such a reader in her simplicity, and flow in eloquence from her lips, when her heart is touched at once with devotion to her Maker, and love for a fallen creature united to her in congenial innocence. The eye of such a meek and humble one falls, as if by a sacred instinct, on the promises of redeeming mercy. If fear and awe mingle with her love, it is but to chasten it into a solemn holiness. The affection she bears to her father on earth is transferred to her Father in Heaven, but more tender, still more overpowering, more full of trust—now indeed piety! Then the Word of God explains itself—there is light upon every page—and the young Christian, indeed, enjoys a revelation!

Emma Cranstoun, in the despondency of disease, and the solitariness of that old mansion, had kept those pernicious letters below her pillow, and read them so often that a belief began to settle in her heart, that their contents were full of fearful truths, and that they might perhaps have been written by a truly religious spirit, in pity of her lost state. But the sound of Lucy's voice, so earnest in her affection and simplicity, dispelled the horrid dream —she allowed herself to be persuaded that Mr Kennedy knew what Christianity was far better than the writer of such letters—and having got the better of worse fears, she began to hope, that perhaps the fear of death might be premature, and that God would yet spare her life for a few years.

For how could life be otherwise than dear to Emma Cranstoun, young, good, beautiful, and rich, both in natural endowments and the gifts of fortune? She had an eye to see the loveliness of earth and heaven—feeling, fancy, and imagination to enjoy, and to create enjoyment. Whatever happiness a human being might derive from this world, and its allowed affections, she might well hope to share, and to shut her eyes for ever upon it all was a rueful thought, and hard to be borne. But she wished still more earnestly to live, that she might do good, and practise the precepts of her faith. All these desires blended together in her prayers, and although sometimes she upbraided herself with too worldly a love of life, at other seasons she felt assured, that her yearning after the good of her fellow-

creatures was sincere, and sincere too, in as far as the frailty of her nature could allow her conviction that there was no virtue but in obedience to the will of God. Sickness, such as hers, sometimes elevates, and sometimes depresses the spirit. But it needs the comfort of human love, and that, in her case, was found in Lucy Forester. "I never sleep—Lucy—at least seldom two hours together, and the nights are weary long! but if I had you in the room, methinks I should have pleasant slumbers."—"Me in the room—my beloved Lady! My mother is well now—and I have a cousin you know at Bracken-Braes to take my place in the house. I beseech you, let me lie beside you, or on the floor close to your bed, a whisper will awake me, and in a short time, in a week or a month at the longest, you will be as well as ever—for, oh! Lady, what mortal creature can do without sleep, and not faint both in body and in soul?"

Some slight opposition was made to the arrangement by an old lady, a relation of Emma's, who had been a sort of guardian to her since her father's death—not the most judiciously chosen in the world—but it was at once overruled; and a bed being made for Lucy, by that of her gracious mistress, it was fixed, by a message to Bracken-Braes, that she should remain a month at the Hirst, the friend of Emma Cranstoun—so said the Lady herself—but Lucy called herself by another name—not even companion, but servant; and in that name she rejoiced with a humble pride.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The duties which Lucy now daily and hourly discharged were to her so truly delightful, and so entirely occupied her whole capacity of affection, that it may almost be said her heart was away from Bracken-Braes, and bound to the Hirst by a spirit of homefelt happiness. Her love to her parents was so vital, that, like the beatings of that heart, it went on unconsciously; nor was the innocent creature afraid or ashamed even occasionally to forget them, knowing well that they were dearer to her than all the rest of the world. From infancy she had loved, honoured, and obeyed them; and since their return from Westmoreland, she felt that their affection for her had if possible increased. More than once they had alluded to her flight to Ellesmere, and in such a way as told Lucy how proud they were of their dutiful daughter. Aunt Isobel had long ceased to scold her on account of that wild adventure, and had even told her, when they two were alone, that she had blessed her on her knees the very hour her flight was known from the little paper in the Bible.

"Yes, my bonnie bairn, I thocht o' the fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'" With Emma Cranstoun, therefore, she could reside without being guilty of any neglect of home—and there was nothing to restrain the flow of all her tenderest and warmest feelings towards her benefactress.

In that feeble and languid frame, both of body and mind, into which the Lady of the Hirst had gradually sunk, the perpetual presence of a creature, so blithe and joyful, yet at the same time so quiet and humble as Lucy, worked like a very charm, and brought back to her beautiful countenance some of those smiles that had been familiar there for several years of renovated health. The spirit of the invalid, when relapsing into melancholy or frightful trains of thought, was arrested by the motions, the words, or the eyes of her devoted attendant, and brought back to the contemplation of this cheerful world. Lucy narrated to her all that she knew of the histories of the families in the parish—and her knowledge was confined to their good qualities, their enjoyments, or their misfortunes. Her little pictures of life were drawn from what she had seen by humble hearths; but they were drawn with animation and delight, since the Lady was desirous to know from her what thoughts and feelings were familiar at the firesides of the poor. The interest which she took in all such representations made Lucy believe more and

more that her own lowly condition was the very happiest that Providence could have bestowed on her; while on the other hand Emma Cranstoun drew from all the tales and stories of the simple girl, a stronger and stronger trust in the power of resignation and faith to support the soul in all extremities. "Let me believe, as all these poor cottagers believe—and my Maker may forgive all my sins, and reconcile me, if it be his will, to an early death."

Lucy had never been at any reading-school, but had been taught to read by her father, and mother, and Aunt Isobel. Ever since the time of her father's blindness, she had read to him two or three hours daily on an average, and during the dead of winter much more than that, and as her understanding and feelings expanded, nature had taught Lucy her own elocution. She always remembered for whose sake she was performing that pleasant task, and filial love and reverence had inspired intonations most touching and expressive. The books, too, that Lucy had read were such as gave her, day after day, insights into that nature to which she belonged; and she had learned to think on it with awe, although yet in her innocence almost ignorant of its evil. Little, therefore, as Lucy Forester had seen or suffered, in that little quiet world, where joy was steady as the daylight, and grief like the mere flitting clouds, she had thoughts and feelings within her heart that rose up to meet whatever was congenial to them, whether offered in conversation of the old, or in the religi-

ous books that formed the chief part of her father's library. Emma Cranstoun could not but listen with delighted surprise to many of the young creature's sentiments, and never did she weary of hearing her silver voice reading portions of her favourite authors, with an accent unrefined no doubt, and with a pronunciation that might have offended very fastidious ears, but with a pathos, or an intelligence alternating beautifully with the various meanings of every passage. While Lucy thus cheered the soul of her benefactress, and by sweet, solemn, or sacred compositions, brought the dim hush of evening imperceptibly on the daylight that was often nearly gone before the sun had been observed by them to be sinking westwards, she at the same time was enlightening her own mind by these labours of love, and gradually coming to know more and more of herself, her fellow-creatures, and her Creator.

Where now were all Emma Cranstoun's elegant and graceful accomplishments, the fruit of a consummate education successfully pursued? Vain indeed did she now hold them all—more vain perhaps than they really were,—for they were intended to adorn the rejoicing days of health, not to support the despondency of sickness. Her lute—her guitar—and her harp were now all silent—and the pencil refused to obey her feeble fingers. Yet Lucy, who had in other days often listened in rapture to the witchery of those stringed instruments, echoing through the saloons of that old hall, or in some secret covert in the huge-armed

woods, and had gazed on the Lady who touched them as on a creature almost too beautiful for this world, could not join in the dispraise or censure of endowments that, when the soul was not sick, could dispense such pure delight. "In a few weeks, my beloved Lady, your hands will again be equal to your music and your drawing—and harm surely there can be none in such gifts as these! Never hearkened I to your singing to the touch of the harp without thinking of hallelujahs in Heaven, and sure enough that is the figure of an Angel you gave me last summer, drawn by your own hand, with a face hidden in adoration of the Great God, by the foldings o' the immortal creature's wings."

Emma Cranstoun possessed much genius, and it was apparent in every trifling work of her hands. She touched nothing, whether it was an article of dress or furniture, or the disposition of a flower-stand, or the arrangement of a rose-bed, or border of carnations or lilies, without producing an effect unattainable by common hands. Lucy was not long in catching something of this spirit of beautiful invention. Above all things, she had ever loved, studied, and understood flowering plants and shrubs, such as in our cold northern climate flourish only under shelter. This lore her father had taught her; for Michael Forester, a botanist and a florist, had come at last to know every plant by the touch of its leaves or its flowers; and many rare specimens had been collected at Bracken-Braes, some of the finest of which were now sent over to the Hirst, for the

Lady's own domestic Green-house between her parlour and her bed-room. Such were the occupations in which Lucy's hours glided away; and when occasionally visitors came to the Hirst, and the Lady was well enough to receive them, Lucy, who knew her own place and office, soon retired modestly from the room, but seldom or never without causing many a question to be asked concerning one so beautiful in her humility.

The Lady of the Hirst had now recovered so much strength, that, of her own accord, she allowed Lucy to return home. "I shall be dull without you, Lucy, and my parlour will soon miss your hands. What will become of our Green-house when you are gone? But you must try to visit me once a-week, if possible, for to you it is but a trip across the braes. I would fain walk with you to the Beeches, but I must not leave the temperature of my sick-room. Perhaps I may be feebler—worse—nearer death, when you come to see me again; but, sweet Lucy, the same love will be in my heart—" and, as she kissed Lucy's cheek, although her own was dry, the kiss touched a gush of tears that were not to be withheld or hidden. "Oh! that you would let me be your servant all the winter; for, if you would, it is certain, with the blessing of God, that you would be quite well in the spring!" This proposal was a pleasant one, indeed, to Emma Cranstoun; and it was arranged, that, if Lucy could leave

Bracken-Braes during the winter, without any distress to her parents, she was to be an inmate at the Hirst.

As the old towers of the Hirst disappeared in the woods, and then the woods themselves in the airy distance, Lucy ceased to reflect, for the present, on the life she had been leading there, and began to think of Mary Morrison and Ewebank. From those pictured walls and hanging curtains, couches and vases, and all the splendid elegancies which to her eyes still wore a charm, shed over them by her own young imagination, she turned, without the slightest abatement of love and delight, into that low and somewhat gloomy hut. There Mary was sitting at her wheel, and her father in his chair by the hearth. Lucy's heart always sunk in his presence, for his aspect wore a settled sternness, and his voice wanted that cordial tone, without which, even the kindest words are felt to want their most essential charm. Mary's face was even paler and more mournful than ever, and as soon as her eye met Lucy's, it was overspread with a disordered flush far from betokening happiness. "So—you have been staying for a month bygone at the Hirst, Miss Lucy," said Abraham, rather ungraciously, and without rising from his chair—"I wish you may not forget your auld friends among sic fine folk. For my ain part, I think Mary there better at hame." Lucy felt that she did not deserve such a reproof, and replied somewhat eagerly, that she would always be happy to visit at any friend's house where she got a warm

welcome. Perhaps she might have said something stronger; but on looking towards Mary, who was stooping down her head, as if busy with disentangling her threads, she observed the tears fast falling, and in a moment changed her voice and her face into her usual sweetness. "No—no, Mr Morrison, I love your daughter Mary better, if indeed that be possible, even than the Lady of the Hirst. We two are equal in condition, although I am somewhat younger in years, and if you, Sir, would be glad to see me here, I will come over to Ewebank every week." The perfect simplicity and sincerity of these words touched Abraham's self-tormenting and discontented spirit; and he told Lucy to sit down, for that she was, he verily believed, the best girl in the parishes either of Ferns or of Holylee. Already by this time were Mary's tears wiped away, and there was something almost like cheerfulness in the house.

Mary Morrison said that she would accompany Lucy part of the way to Bracken-Braes, and they walked on in silence. But just as Mary turned about to communicate some sorrow, Edward Ellis was seen bounding down the hill; so she hastily wrung Lucy's hand, and with a face of deep melancholy returned to Ewebank.

It was not possible for Lucy's heart not to throw off much of its sadness, whether for her own sake or that of others, on this sudden appearance of Edward Ellis. Circumstances had prevented her from seeing much of

him since her return from Ellesmere, and she had never been alone in his company since that midnight journey among the mountains. The many affecting thoughts that had almost ever since possessed her heart had by no means excluded his image; but they had certainly hindered it from occupying her waking and her sleeping dreams so fully as it had once done, and had subdued her affection down to what might now with some truth perhaps have been called the affection of a sister. Serene in her sense of duty towards her parents and her friends, Lucy met his approach with a countenance sparkling with unconcealed happiness, and she expressed in words that came from the very heart her delight at this unexpected meeting. "I never liked, Mr Ellis, to say all I thought before people, even before my father and my mother themselves; but now that we are alone, I pray to Heaven to bless you and yours, in your own country or in foreign parts, all your life. Your goodness to me has been beyond all gratitude, and sometimes, Sir, remember on the Sabbaths, that there is ane praying for you in the Kirk o' Holylee."

Edward Ellis was little more experienced in this life than Lucy Forester herself; and as he ventured to kiss those soft blue eyes that as they smiled upon him swam with misty tears, he felt that she was dearer to him than he knew in her simplicity, and not to be parted from for ever without an indefinite despondency and distress. It seemed to him as if Lucy

had grown nearer to woman's height and form since the night he had met her at the Linn,—that her countenance had lost something of its more childish prettyness, but had gained unspeakably in the expression of intelligence and feeling—and that even her voice was tuned to a deeper softness that thrilled to his very heart. Neither had that month's residence at the Hirst been thrown away upon one so quick to perceive and learn; an unconscious air of grace, beyond what is native to the cottage, was visible over her demeanour; and in her dress still suitable to the Shepherdess of Bracken-Braes, the name by which he had loved to call her, there was a rustic elegance no doubt finely imitated, or rather inspired, from that of Emma Cranstoun. Like a bird, too, escaped from a happy confinement which it had no wish to leave, but still rejoicing in its new-found liberty, Lucy once more felt elated in the open air of the Braes, and now bounded along the heather, not so lightly indeed as not to bend down the purple fruit-stalks, for that is done by the leveret and the lapwing, but so lightly and so quickly too, that it was not without some effort that Edward Ellis, who was esteemed active even among the hill-side shepherds, kept pace with her gladsome career.

But they stood together by a little spring, known only to hunters and shepherds, overshadowed by a rock, whose base was covered with briar, broom, and bracken, and from whose cleft-summit grew one solitary drooping birch-tree. "Lucy—I am about to leave Holylee—I know

not if for ever. No—no—not for ever—yet it may be years before I return to visit Mr Kennedy and your Father. A change has been suddenly made in the plan of my education—and to-morrow I go away. Will you accept a few keepsakes? Never again shall I meet with so sweet a maiden as Lucy Forester, nor one whom I love so well." Lucy had scarcely power to reply; but, with a faltering voice and trembling hand she accepted them, and after a few inarticulate words of affection, put them without looking what they were, into her bosom.

Edward Ellis knew not what was the nature of his feelings, nor what ought now to be his conduct. His boyish passion—at least delightful affection for Lucy Forester had for nearly a year past been growing with his growth, and now that he had even expressed it, he felt as if Lucy were betrothed to him by her kind acceptance of his love-gifts. But what could that word "betrothed" mean between him a mere boy, and the daughter still younger of a man in Michael Forester's humble situation of life? Again he fixed his gazing eyes upon her, and her beauty was more and more irresistible. "When I return—Lucy—after a few years—I shall find you married to Isaac Mayne, the famous scholar."—"Never—never,"—and Lucy, unrestrained by shame or pride, now wept bitterly; for thoughts over which she had no power came in a tumult into her heart, and almost stopped its beatings, quick and strong as they had for some moments been in that sudden colloquy. There

had been a dream enveloping her, which yet she had not known to be a dream, till now she saw it dissolving with all its enchantments. Now had she the first agonizing insight into her own heart, and into many feelings that lay couched there, strong as life itself, feelings that had been rising there in rapid growth every hour since that travel, side by side with Edward Ellis beneath the moon and stars. A sudden gladness was breathed over her soul—an intimation given that grief is a guest in every human breast—a voice whispering that she must forbid that glee in which she had revelled from the first morning-light—that she must tame the fairy flight of those footsteps over the daisied green—that the laughter indulged to childhood must be now restrained—and that tears, or a calmness more sorrowful than tears, must often now subdue the smiles that had hidden her eyes as it were in their own kindling light. Something was to be removed soon, sudden, and for ever, that unknown to herself had been the chief bliss of life. Her brother, Edward, was no more to visit Bracken-Braes! yet even in that fit of grief, her heart acknowledged him to be her brother, for what affection could be more sisterly, pure, and irreproachable? What although a few sobs were heard! Yet was that affection not to cease—not to be utterly extirpated—but by absence and separation kept down within the heart, till reason and religion should overmaster it, before affection became love, and love trouble, and then the whole of life by night and by day, in the lonesome glen, or the

crowded House of God, infested by one dream never to be broken, stronger even than piety or superstition, and colouring all the humblest incidents of life with one hue, till the soul, formerly free in its wandering innocence, should be enslaved at last beneath the bondage of one unrelenting passion.

A shepherd came up unperceived to the Hawkstane Spring, and relieved by this interruption, Edward and Lucy accompanied him down to the Heriot-Water. The presence of an indifferent person soon calms even the strongest emotion, and before they reached Bracken-Braes, the brother and sister, or if it must be so, the youthful lovers were, if not cheerful, almost again happy.

Mr Kennedy had been there only an hour before, and had acquainted them with Mr Ellis's intended departure next morning. Every one was, if possible, kinder and more tenderly respectful to the noble youth than they had ever intentionally been before, and when, at last, he reluctantly rose to go not without a choked voice and tears in his eyes, Michael Forester stood up and blessed him with a fervent voice. As for the rest, they were unable to speak, and when they found that Edward Ellis was indeed gone, they wondered how they could have suffered him to depart without expressions of greater affection.

Agnes said to Lucy that she seemed fatigued with her walk, and desired her to retire to rest. She was fain to escape to her little lonely room, and weep there un-

observed. The Lady of the Hirst, as some thought, in a dying state—Mary Morrison unhappy—and Edward Ellis gone away for ever! But her prayers calmed her heart, and in little more than an hour, when Aunt Isobel slipped into her room to give her the usual farewell kiss for the night, Lucy Forester was asleep, and her face as tranquil as that of a child in its cradle.

CHAPTER XXX.

The morning on which Lucy was to leave home, for a whole winter, rose bright and beautiful, and all the family assembled cheerfully under the Plane-Tree to bid her a happy farewell. Her parents were the proudest people in the whole world, but theirs was a pride indulged in profoundest gratitude to the Giver of all Mercies. Their child was beloved over all the parish, and in every house she had friends, but she was now going to become the chosen companion of her whose very smiles were a blessing, and they felt that, in case of their own death, Lucy would have an asylum at the Hirst, where the orphan could well repay her benefactress for the protection of her innocence. Therefore, so far from its looking like a parting scene, every face kindled with pleasure as at a return. Michael stood with his calm countenance in the morning light, turned affectionately towards his child, as happy as any man in existence. Agnes had herself assisted Lucy in dressing, and regarded her with a mother's admiring eyes, as her beauty shone with a more

joyful lustre, in the consciousness of her neatly ordered array, and the anticipation of Emma Cranstoun's embrace. Aunt Isobel said, that she now loved Martha so well, that she would never miss Lucy, but reminded her, at the same time, with a hand fondly laid on her bosom, that once a-week had she promised to see them all at Bracken-Braes, and never to miss a single Sabbath at the kirk of Holylee. Martha was sincerely happy at her kind cousin's good fortune, and expressed her happiness in her usual homely language. So away danced Lucy across the hills—her last kiss, and her last whisper, perhaps a tear, having been given as his due to her blind father.

"Where now is Edward Ellis?" thought Lucy with a sigh, as she glided up and down the solitary places, the rocks and braes, the mosses and the coppice-woods, through which he had accompanied her but a few weeks ago. With something like pain and reluctance she turned aside to the little shaded spring, on whose mossy brink they had sat and conversed so affectionately, like brother and sister. That pleasant dream was vanished—the same blue unclouded sky was reflected in the water, but a dead silence lay around—and that delightful voice and those beaming eyes were gone, and for ever. Lucy took from her bosom some of the small memorials of his affection, which, for reasons she scarcely knew, she had always concealed from every eye, and unconsciously put them to her lips. "God bless him all his days," was the prayer she breathed as she returned the trifles

to the fair warmth of her breast, which in a few minutes beat with all its wonted tranquillity.

It was a clear October day, the sky perfectly settled, the air pure as pure might be, and a slight frost, beautiful as dew, lying yet unmelted over the discoloured heather. Lucy looked back to the happy parting below the Plane-Tree, and forwards to the Hirst, and all sad thoughts either faded away, or were tinged with the joyfulness of a hopeful spirit. "Why sit singing there, sweet robin-redbreast, on a briary stone-pillar in the moors? The summer days are all over and gone, and in another month may be coming the snow. Away, sweet robin-redbreast—away to Bracken-Braes, and trill that bit short merry sang o' thine frae the roof o' the barn, till not a leaf is left on our Plane-Tree, and then keep hopping about the door, and in and out of the window, as you have done for seven winters."

Lucy was now nearly half way to the Hirst, for she was standing on a small eminence, called the Gowan-Green, where Mary Morrison and she had often sat together for hours in their plaids, both in gloom and in sunshine. Here they had often waited for each other, on those days when it was known that Lucy was going to the Hirst, and when not lucky enough to meet, each betokened her disappointment by a bunch of heather or wild-flowers laid on the middle of that platform. It was not easy to imagine a place more solitary. No streamlets here murmured along the bases of the hills that came close together without any intervening

vallies, however narrow. But just below the eminence lay a little lake, or tarn, not much larger than a pond, self-fed, and black with its moorland water. The long heather quite surrounded it, except on the side of the Gowan-Green which sloped away down to the margin, with its short smooth pasture. A number of large loose stones, for they could hardly be called rocks, lay here and there upon the water edge, and a few birch trees were sprinkled among the stunted hazles. There were no features belonging to the scene that could be called beautiful; yet, on a fine day, the lonesome place was pleasant in its silence, and in spring or early summer, there was constantly here the sweet fragrance of whins, broom, and briar, with which was intermingled that of many unnoticed wild-flowers, as well as that of the lady-fern, and of the birches some of which eaten down by the sheep were not much taller than that graceful plant. Lucy and Mary had once passed a whole summer Sabbath here, without any interruption, from morning to night. It so happened that there had been no Divine Service either at Holylee or the Ferns, and here the two happy creatures had agreed to pass the whole day, reading their Bibles, singing hymns in the wilderness, and talking over all the concerns of their young and innocent life.

Ewebank, the house of Mary Morrison, was not very far off; and Lucy knowing how early in the morning it yet was, resolved to surprise her by a visit before perhaps her hearth was kindled. Looking down upon the

tarn, behold upon the stony edge of the water she saw a female figure with her face covered with her hands, and a man standing beside her apparently in great agitation. The figure lifted up its face for a moment, and she knew that it was Mary Morrison. The man paced to and fro, a short distance, and ever and anon stood close beside Mary, with violent gesticulations, and attitudes bespeaking rage and hatred. At length he seized Mary by the hair, who fell down on her knees, and clasped her hands together in supplication. In his right hand there seemed to be a large stone picked up from the edge of the tarn; and all at once Lucy knew that he was about to be a murderer. The dead silence of the lonesome place—and the furious looks of the ruffian quailed Lucy's heart within her, and her first impulse was to fly back towards Bracken-Braes, or sink down where she stood in concealment among the heather. But her love for meek Mary Morrison— the first and best friend of her youth prevailed, and uttering a wild cry, she flew down the hill-side towards the tarn, and in a few moments was at her side. Mary fixed her eyes upon her friend with a wild look, and then upon him whose hand had suddenly let go its grasp of the wretched creature's hair, and said quakingly,—"Oh! Mark Thornhill—Mark Thornhill—have pity upon us—murder us not—for we are baith young—and as for me, sair need hae I o' repentance." The stone fell from his right hand—the paleness of fear seemed to pass over the deadly scowl of wrath, and his knees knocked

against each other in the sudden remorse of an unacted crime. But still an evil demon kept whispering in his ear, that Mary and Lucy were yet in the power of the criminal. Mary Morrison, who had felt that her last hour was come, had not strength to rise up from her knees, but sunk down altogether, and lay insensible among the hard flints of the beach. For a short time not a word was uttered, but all was silent in the fear of death that still overshadowed that solitary place.

Lucy knew nothing of the dreadful mystery in which she had all at once been involved. But her courage did not desert her, and she beseeched Mark Thornhill, for she caught his name in Mary's indistinct supplications, to look upon them both without anger, and that God would forgive and reward him for his pity. That hand which had been clenched to do a deed of death could not now have hurt a hair of Mary Morrison's head. It was quelled by the sudden beauty of that fearless innocence coming upon him, as if from heaven to save him from perdition. He had received a reprieve from crime. Mary ventured to lift up her face from the sand, and saw that he was not relentless. "Swear—swear that you are not my wife—and that you will never claim me as your husband."—"I swear it," said Mary, and again bowed down her head. Her betrayer moved slowly and sullenly away—and disappearing over the Gowan-Green, left Mary and Lucy alone on the brink of the Ouzel-Loch.

Guilt and its miseries had hitherto been to Lucy Forester like the words of a strange tongue. And now nothing distinct—nothing that could be borne to be thought of had entered her mind. But there lay meek Mary Morrison ashamed to look her in the face—and uttering no words but these, "This will break my father's heart—this will break my father's heart. Oh! Lucy—gang away to the Hirst—and leave me here to die—for when you ken what I am now, your eyes will smile on me never-mair—and yet I surely think they will weep for me when I am dead and buried in sin and shame, and sorrow!" Lucy was weeping for her already—nor had these dismal words any power to deaden her affection. She assisted Mary to rise from that cruel bed, and in a little while, was sitting with an arm round her neck, where they had so often sat and sang in their joy, on a knoll in the centre of the Gowan-Green.

There was for a long time sobbing and sighing, and then dead silence. Lucy was the first to speak. "Mary—Mary—will you hear me? Well then here before our Father which is in Heaven, and Him who died for us, do I upon my knees say unto you, that I will never forsake you—that I will not only pity you, and pray for you night and day, but I will love you better, far better than ever—let others do as they may—I at least will be the same to you as ever—yes, Mary, I will love you beyond all living creatures but my father and mother. If I do not, may the gates of yon-

der blue skies never be opened to me by the hands of God's holy angels!"

Mary Morrison was yet too young to be sick of life. Solitary, and but for Lucy, friendless as that life had been, still it had too much sunshine to be exchanged without dismay for the darkness of the grave. Even shame, she began to think, might be borne, if Lucy would but continue to look on her with unaverted and unchanged eyes in her disgrace. "Perhaps even my father may be brought to forgive me!" But that was a transient thought—for although she loved her father, she feared that forgiveness was not in his nature for such a crime. Suddenly her heart burned within her, and kneeling down beside Lucy, who was still on her knees, she exclaimed, "God will bless you, Lucy, for this—but hear me now, and believe me when I say that I am not so guilty as people will think. I will keep my oath—Lucy—for you heard me swear—but to you who saw so much I may speak without being foresworn—guilty as I am, yet in the sight of Heaven am I his wife, and Mark Thornhill is my husband! Yes! Lucy—we were married before two witnesses—and Mark gave me a paper, saying I was his wife—but, waes me! he does not care for me now, he has sent the witnesses out of the way, and as for the writing, he tore it out of my bosom this dreadful morning, and it is destroyed for ever. Nobody will ever believe now that we were married—and, oh! how can I face my father?"

In a few hours—for hours indeed past by and the sun was high in heaven—Mary Morrison had told Lucy her history over and over again many many times, and she began to feel even some relief from her conscience in her friend's unabated affection. She even ventured to think it possible that Lucy's father and mother would not altogether forsake her in her shame, for shame there was indeed to be, worse than all other evils except—death. But then she thought of her own father, and her heart died within her, for she knew too well, that, as soon as she confessed to him, never again would she be allowed to darken the door of Ewebank.

At last they parted—Mary to her father's, and Lucy for one night, and one night only, to the Hirst—for she was determined to tell every thing she durst to her father, and beseech him to go over in the morning to Ewebank.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lucy left the Hirst before morning had entirely dimmed the stars, and had to tap for admission into the house at the window of her father's room, for sleep yet held all the family at Bracken-Braes. The story she had to tell about Mary Morrison greatly disturbed her parents and Aunt Isobel, and, for a while, Lucy feared that her unhappy friend was to be deserted in her misery. Michael, Agnes, and Isobel were all too sensible of their own failings and frailties, and too religiously impressed with an habitual sense of the utter weakness of human nature, to judge and condemn sternly the errors or sins of their fellow Christians. But this was a case that it was necessary to understand perfectly before they could decide what was their duty. They were bound by love, nature, and religion, to protect their daughter from all stain of pollution, and to sever her inexorably from her tenderest friendships, rather than suffer her to incur any danger, however slight, of being contaminated by evil example. They all loved Mary Morrison, and could not easily

believe in her guilt—but they knew how many shades of sin darken the actions of us mortal creatures, and perhaps that poor girl, although more the object of pity than blame, had nevertheless grievously erred. From Lucy's story, they saw enough to determine them all to give Mary their compassion, their condolence, and their support in the agony of her affliction, in so far as that could be done, without violating the awful sanctity of the moral law, and thereby tainting perhaps the very atmosphere in which their own Lucy breathed. They all remembered Mary's meekness and modesty—her unrepining gentleness under the severities of a cruel parent—her grateful disposition, indeed almost too grateful, to them at Bracken-Braes, for even the commonest courtesies and kindnesses—and that deep sense of religion, which more constantly than with any one they knew, influenced her whole conduct and demeanour, and made her, without excepting even their own Lucy, the most perfect model of a Christian daughter.

Lucy was altogether overcome by the thought that her father and mother might be about to leave Mary Morrison to her fate. True to her promise to that unfortunate creature, she had not disclosed all she knew, and thus her pleadings for her beloved friend had been in their most passionate earnestness, perplexing and imperfect. At last she hinted that there was a secret that must not be revealed, and by degrees her father came to understand something of its nature, and

of the obligation Lucy had come under to observe silence. The clear and high understanding of Michael Forester was not to be deceived by the sophistry which fear and shame had whispered to the hearts of his daughter and her friend. The truth must be told, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, else God, the Searcher and Judge of all hearts, would not be well pleased. Promises and oaths, by whomsoever extorted, under such circumstances, must be given to the winds, and a full confession made before God and man of the sin, and of the aggravating or palliating circumstances with which it might have been attended. There was no speck, no dimness on the eye of Michael Forester's mind, and he saw that here there was selfish, and licentious, and cruel guilt trampling upon abused and terrified innocence. "This," said the Blind Man, "with the blessing of God, must not be, and I feel myself called upon to be the minister of His Eternal Justice."

What tears poured down the pale face of Agnes and what fear quaked within her heart, when Lucy narrated all that had happened at the Ouzel-Loch! "Manifestly the arm of mercy was over our child, Michael, else had that bonnie head of hers been laid cruelly in the dust." Lucy was too anxious about Mary Morrison to hear even the just commendation of herself, although coming from the lips of those whom it was the sole object of her life to make happy, and she only exclaimed, "You will not forsake Mary now, father, should she be driven from Ewebank? Oh! will

you—say that you will receive her into our ain house, for, unless we do so, her heart will break, and before the end of the week Mary Morrison will be in her grave."—"Yes—my Lucy—if she needs it, the door of Bracken-Braes shall be open to her, nor do I fear although her head should even lie on the same pillow with that of my own child."

Michael and Lucy were not long in setting out for Ewebank. Few words were spoken as they crossed the solitary hills and vallies, for Michael was settling in his own mind all that ought to be said to the father of Mary Morrison. On reaching Ewebank, Lucy saw him walking about distractedly, with his grey head uncovered, in a small garden close to the hut. A frown was settled on his forehead and all about his eyes as firmly as if it had been their constant expression—his cheeks seemed rigid, and his white lips quivered as in convulsions. In a low voice Lucy described to her father his agitated state. "This is, indeed, a distressing affliction—Abraham—and I feel for you—for I, too, have but an only child. I have ventured over to pray with you—to comfort you in any way one Christian may comfort another—and especially, my worthy friend, to inform you of something that goes far to prove your daughter's innocence."—"May the curse of God cleave to her—the wages of sin are death!" and he again paced to and fro with clenched hands, and eyes uplifted to heaven in savage supplication. "May I ask where she is, Abraham?—but I beseech you by Him who died

for us on the Tree, not to curse the daughter of Alice Gray!" That name rooted the angry sufferer to the ground; but, again, he tore himself away, and cried aloud,—" Yes—I curse her, and may she be cursed, for she has covered these white hairs with shame," and he flung down a handful of his long silvery locks, and trampled upon them with his feet. Lucy was terrified at the sight, and retiring to a little distance, sat down upon a bank. " Where is your daughter—Abraham? —for I feel as if God sent me here to reconcile you unto her."—" Call her not my daughter, for daughter she is none of mine—neither know I where the prostitute has hidden herself from my wrath—in the moor, or the mosses, or the Ouzel-Loch. Never again may these eyes behold her in life," and at these words he burst out into hideous laughter, all drenched in a flood of tears, and fell down with great violence to the earth.

Michael heard the fall, and Lucy was coming to his assistance, when, issuing silently as a ghost from the Birch-Wood, the edge of which came almost close upon the garden, Mary Morrison was already on her knees, with her father's head supported on her bosom. " This is my doing—Mr Forester—all my wicked doing—you had far better leave me to my death, after you have recovered my father. Oh! that he could be taken over to Bracken-Braes, and comforted back again into his reason. As for me it is but just that I should die. But see —see—Lucy, his eyes are opening—and now he shuts

them upon me, for I am hateful in my sin, and most loathsome to my father's soul. I must hide myself again in the thicket among the briars—if I touch him perhaps he will kill me—Oh! Mr Forester, invite him over to Bracken-Braes, and tell him that I have fled out of the parish to pollute his eyes never mair on this side o' the grave." Mary Morrison then started up and disappeared.

That paroxysm had in some measure allayed the passion in Abraham Morrison's spirit, by the weakness which it induced over his entire frame. He almost seemed as if a palsy had stricken him, but by and by he revived, and in a sort of stupor walked into the house, followed by Michael and Lucy. Unconscious of his actions he sat down as usual in his chair by the hearthside, on which no fire was burning, and his hand falling violently upon that Book which speaks only of mercy and forgiveness, he again uttered an indistinct curse upon his child. It appeared that he had been reading the Bible, but some evil spirit had turned over the leaves, and the balm of consolation was to him poison, bitter and mortal. Lucy stood trembling behind her father, and then said in a whisper, "I will go to Mary in the wood."

Perhaps Abraham Morrison knew not that any one was in the room, for now his words seemed to be uttered as if to himself in solitude. "If ever I forgive her—may I be unforgiven! If she dies in child-birth, and I shed a tear, may it sink like a spark of hell into my

heart!" Then gazing on Michael Forester, he started up and cried with a loud voice, "What brought you hither, Mr Forester? Go home and watch your own child—for young as she is, and with a smile upon her face, how know you that she may not be a sinner, and up to the lips in pollution?"—"Abraham Morrison," said the Blind Man, standing like a prophet, with his outstretched arm, and tall figure straight and still in its majesty of command—"Abraham Morrison—remember that you are a father, and that none other but the hand of the Almighty can break that bond that ties you all the days of your life to your child. Be she even guilty—the voice of the Great God commands you to forgive her, for in his sight you are far guiltier than she—yes—Abraham Morrison, your sins have been many, and they have been done under the shadow of grey hairs—hers have been few, and this—I know it well—this is the poor creature's birthday, and she is but seventeen years! But hearken unto me—Abraham—I command you to hearken unto me—your daughter's heart is unpolluted, and if her father deserts her, then this very night shall she sleep in my own Lucy's arms. Grant, O God! thy blessing on this afflicted house." And Michael Forester stood a little while with his head gently bowed, and his hands uplifted in the attitude of prayer.

It is in the power of a strong and stubborn heart not only to harden itself against all natural affection, but to triumph in what it strives within itself to consider

in the light of a sacrifice. So was it now with Abraham Morrison. He knew well—it was not possible to keep that knowledge from his conscience—that he had denied his daughter all the harmless amusements and pastimes of youth—that he had closed his heart against her in all his domestic hours, finding at last a sullen satisfaction in tyrannizing over the gentle, and obedient, and unrepining creature whom he could not but love—that he had often left her quite alone in that solitary hut for long days together, and uncared for and unguarded among the hills—and now that evil had befallen her innocence, instead of looking into his own unfatherly conduct, he steeled himself against her in his very remorse, and took refuge in the excommunication of his own flesh and blood from the privileges of nature. It was all in vain for Michael Forester to exculpate her, or palliate her transgression. She herself had the night before told her own pitiable story, but under the terror of that oath had said not a word against her betrayer and her murderer. The stern old man adhered cruelly to her own confession, and all Michael's words rebounded back as if from a rock. He too who thus unmercifully judged his daughter's transgression, thought far more of himself and the shame that had fallen upon him, than of her guilt in the eyes of her Maker, or even of the Eternal's goodness to his fallen creatures. The eyes and the tongues of men were to him not endurable in their scorn and condemnation; and his pride wished that rather than this disgrace, his

daughter had been drowned, or had perished in fire. He had borne ill his many worldly misfortunes, and although his integrity had been unimpeached, he repined in his poverty. His crops had been oftener withered or blasted, he thought, than those of his neighbours—diseases came among his cattle more frequently than among theirs—and nothing prospered about Ewebank ever since he had been its tenant. There had always been an evil eye upon the place, and now the whole phials of wrath had been poured out, and he was ready to curse God and die. "Go home—Mr Forester—go home with your daughter—and leave me in my misery. As for her, if she cross my threshold again, may she drop down dead upon the floor."

Lucy came into the room, and taking her father's hand to lead him out, they left the hut unnoticed by the wretched man who sat with his eyes sullenly fixed upon the dead ashes on the hearth. They entered the Birch-Wood by a small glade, and there Mary Morrison was lying upon the ground. "Oh ! father," said Lucy, "we must take Mary with us, for she has been all night long in this very place, afraid even of her life, so fiercely did her father rage against her—and if left here she will surely die." Michael took her into his arms and kissed her cheek, but he could not see what Lucy wept to behold, the mark of violence upon her face, no doubt from her father's hand, although Mary had said not a word of that cruelty, and beseeched them both to

forgive him, for that her misconduct had driven him to distraction.

They once more passed near the door of the hut, but nothing stirred within; and Mary, who was almost helpless from her sufferings, permitted herself to be taken away from Ewebank, and without speaking a single word all the way, found herself at Bracken-Braes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Lucy's visit to the Hirst was necessarily delayed, at least for a few days, till the mental agonies of Mary Morrison might be assuaged by the tenderest sympathies of those who seemed indeed now to be her only friends on earth. Not a word of forgiveness came from her own unrelenting father, and she was indeed an orphan. Few friends had she ever had to cheer her solitary life, and those few deserted her in her disgrace. Abraham Morrison was but a poor man, and therefore people, whom his disagreeable character had repelled from Ewebank, had no selfish inducement now to offer any comfort in his affliction. He became an object of blame rather than of pity, although both feelings might well have been entertained towards him, and his daughter's fall was at every fireside laid to the charge of his austerity or indifference. This Abraham knew, and while his heart acknowledged that the charge was true, yet he sullenly regarded those by whom it was made, and his conscience hardened itself in pride against those haunting visitations that come upon the lonely hours of

every man that forgets or violates any of the great natural duties. He continued obdurate in his unrelenting misery within the gloom of his hut, and not one of the few neighbours who had gone to see him repeated the visit, for they saw that their interference only served to embitter the poison on which he fed. He took an old pauper into his house, stricken with many of the infirmities of age, but who, silent in her deafness and indifference to life, could yet bring water from the well, dig up vegetables from the garden, prepare his meals which now he scarcely asked God to bless, and make that bed on which he had lain with open eyes ever since his daughter had sunk into sin and shame—for from these words he would not depart; and dwelt upon them till his whole mind was exclusively filled with hideous and dreadful images.

Meanwhile various judgments were passed on the unfortunate girl and her friends at Bracken-Braes. It would sometimes seem as if the human heart, even in a state of comparative innocence and simplicity, found a pleasure in the worst distresses that can befall our common nature, and eyes that ought to overflow with compassion are often averted from suffering with a coldness that is indeed absolute cruelty. The young feared to pity Mary Morrison lest their own purity might be suspected, and the old lost in their anxiety for the virtue of their own children, the common feelings of humanity for her who had deviated from its paths. The censure was generally loud, the pity in a

whisper; and when, in a week or two, gentler judgments and feelings arose, people were beginning to lose an interest in what did not immediately concern themselves, and Mary Morrison's name, if not forgotten, was unpronounced as if by general agreement. Neither was the conduct of Michael Forester and his wife allowed to pass without many comments—some of them by no means favourable; but his commanding character silenced open blame, and Michael was not a man to heed the opinions of the timid or uninformed, in a case where his duty shone clearly before him, and where nature and religion alike bade him shelter the orphan head. He did by no means despise the opinions of his fellow-creatures, but his conscience was his monitor, and a monitor enlightened by the Bible. Therefore no misgivings assailed the constancy of his protecting affection towards poor Mary Morrison—and he determined to see her vindicated before the eyes of men, as he believed her to be nearly so in the eyes of God.

The intensity of Lucy's love for Mary Morrison rendered her wholly indifferent to any painful rumours, accidentally overheard, and she also reposed a perfect reliance on the judgment of her parents and Aunt Isobel, which would always have reconciled her conscience to any thing they approved. But when she was given to understand that the Lady of the Hirst no longer desired her attendance, then indeed a pang pierced her heart, and she wept sorely over the loss of such friendship. Emma Cranstoun was the very soul of candour,

intelligence, and pity, but to one in her situation, the knowledge of what is transacting in the houses of the poor must often come in baneful whispers, and in cases of error or misfortune can scarcely fail of being perplexing and imperfect. Lucy herself she had not seen, and with one so very young it would not have been possible to converse on such a subject. Emma Cranstoun therefore heard the truth with every accompaniment of falsehood, even from those who did not mean either to deceive or traduce; the unhappy girl's stay at Bracken-Braes she felt to place an insuperable impediment in the way of her friendship with Lucy Forester—and while she still continued to think with affection and gratitude of all her services, and with almost unimpaired admiration of her character, nevertheless a necessity was imposed upon her to release Lucy from her engagement at the Hirst. Such another attendant on her sick-bed she well knew was nowhere to be found; but she could not in this matter run counter not only to the determined resolution of Mrs Ramsay, but to the implied advice and open remonstrances of all her other friends.

The loss of the Lady's love was to Lucy like the darkening of the daylight. For several years she had felt her own nature elevated by constant communion with such a perfect being as, in her enthusiasm, she not very erroneously considered Emma Cranstoun; and to be not only severed from that communion, but thought no longer worthy of it, sunk Lucy in her

own esteem; and deprived of that stay, she seemed to sink away back into an inferior condition, such as had contented her childhood before that beautiful and beneficent creature had ever been seen at Bracken-Braes. But for whose sake had she sustained this great loss? For meek Mary Morrison, with whom she had never had one unkind word—with whom she had sat in the same plaid a hundred times before she ever knew that the Lady of the Hirst was in existence—whom she had called her sister, and indeed loved as if they had lain in one cradle—and towards whom at all times profoundest pity had mingled an inexpressible charm with the joyfulness of affection. Lucy now turned back her heart to the past, and remembered many many words and looks during several years which she had but little attended to, but which now affected her with the knowledge of unhappiness borne uncomplainingly by the poor girl whose mother was dead, and whose father was little disposed to supply her loss. She wondered how she could ever have been so blind as not to see Mary's wretchedness at home, and thought now how much better it would have been to have wept along with her than to have talked merrily and laughed too in the sunshine of bygone summer days. But now amends will be made for all such oversight—and sooner will the bird forget its nest, than Lucy to supply hourly comfort to her sister. Mary Morrison had never spoken much even in her happier days—for gentle smiles and affectionate eyes filled up the pauses

of their artless talk; but now not a smile was seen—those eyes, as it was fitting they should do, rested on the ground, and shunned the sunshine—and her pale lips were mute, except when a sigh would have its utterance, and her bosom heaved in agony to think that one human being could have had the heart to use another as Mark Thornhill had used her, without pity or repentance, and yet knowing all the time that there was a God in Heaven!

But it was not her own loss alone that affected Lucy when she thought of the Lady of the Hirst—"For what hands can tend her so carefully as mine would have done? What eyes will open at midnight so readily as mine did at the slightest whisper—or whenever my beloved benefactress moved her head upon the pillow? No—not one in all Scotland could serve her like me—or like me go with her, if she chose, to the uttermost parts of the earth!" Then something like pride—a stirring of that elevated spirit which virtue breathes into the simplest and humblest heart—and which may prostrate itself wholly before him alone from whose throne it comes—rose to Lucy's support, and made her lift up her head undepressed with all its golden ringlets—till again the Lady lying languid, and faint, and feverish, on her couch, perhaps all alone in that vast and solitary hall, appeared before her, and then fain would Lucy have knelt before that image, and beseeched her once more to restore to favour the servant once

beloved, and now more devoted than ever, although the light of that countenance was alas! withdrawn.

In a month's time the heart of Mary Morrison in some degree revived. Nothing but guilt need be permanently miserable, and that faith which she had learnt from her infancy, and which, with all his other lamentable faults, her father had venerated, outwardly at least, before his daughter, was not found a cold and barren creed, now that she read her Testament with eyes that dropt tears on every page. Truly parental tenderness now met her on every occasion, however small, on which it could be shown; so much affection she thought surely could not thus be felt by the good for her if she were quite worthless; no restraint was laid on her intercourse with Lucy, and above all things else, that thought would comfort her even on the bed of death. "Michael and Agnes Forester let their innocent child sleep in my bosom—and oh! merciful God, forgive him, and inspire with another heart, who has fixed upon it a stain of pollution—for I thought that I was his wife, and my sin was more in ignorance than from a corrupted heart. So at least I humbly hope to be judged at the great day!"

The unprincipled man who had thus betrayed the unsuspecting and unprotected innocence of Mary Morrison had left the country, and no one knew where he had gone; but Michael Forester communicated all her case to Mr Kennedy, and they did not doubt that it would be in their power some day to establish proofs

of her marriage. Meanwhile Mary accompanied the family to church; and although on the first Sabbath the trial was terrible, and she would fain have sunk and disappeared down among the bones, and skulls, and rotten coffins of the grave, when she felt hundreds of eyes all dreadfully dazzling upon her face, and searching pitilessly into her soul, yet that coarse curiosity could not sustain itself against one so perfectly humbled in contrition, and sitting between such friends as Agnes and Lucy. On the fourth Sabbath, the few looks that sought her out were of the most compassionate character, and sufficient to show that innocence will ultimately triumph even in this world, dark and disastrous as may be its days of suffering. Her father belonged to another congregation—but he was never out of Mary's sight during the whole time of service.

Although Emma Cranstoun did not ask Lucy to come to her at the Hirst, yet she knew too thoroughly the characters of all at Bracken-Braes, to treat them with neglect or displeasure. Many kind inquiries still came, and Lucy had even received two or three letters, expressed almost with her former free affection. Lucy could not but look forward, in her hopeful nature, to being restored some day to the place she had left in her bosom, and beside her bed; and, "perhaps, even when the whole truth is brought to light, my conduct may be approved, and Mary Morrison forgiven." But the most alarming rumours respecting the Lady's health were now prevalent over the whole parish—Mr Ken-

nedy evidently spoke as if his fears were greatly increased—and Lucy often awoke in the middle of the night, shrieking out that the Lady of the Hirst was dying—or dead. More than once, too, had she dreamed of recovery and reconcilement, and on awaking, felt heaven with all its ecstasy changed in a moment into this mournful earth.

Unable to endure all this fear, and all this love, Lucy resolved to go to the Hirst, and find entrance to that room which she had so often decked to please her mistress's eyes, and never in vain. She knew that her intrusion would cause no disturbance, and that, if turned away from the gate. her tears would drop to the ground in silence. No angry frown, she felt assured, would fall upon one who had so often sung in Emma Cranstoun's hearing hymns in praise of their God; and the gracious Lady who had so often smiled upon her dutiful Lucy, and held her hand, when together they knelt down in prayer—the daughter of a long line of illustrious ancestry, and the child of a peasant whose forefathers had all been dwellers beneath straw-roofs—such an one would remember their pleasant devotion, and for the sake of their common hopes of heaven, perhaps not refuse once more to take her back to her bosom. "Then, too," thought Lucy, "I can judge for myself, if there be any change on her cheek for better or worse—but hope I will never resign till I am forced to look at her grave!"

There was no unfilial disobedience in stealing away

one fine winter morning, with a hesitating hint that she was going to Ladyside, and directing her steps as soon as she was out of sight toward the Hirst. She soon found herself on one of those beautiful winding walks through the woods where she had so often accompanied the Lady farther and farther on into the solitude of the waterfalls. Winter had stript the most of the trees, and the withered leaves rustled mournfully beneath her feet. But still there was sunshine, and looking towards the hall, every window seemed on fire with its cheerful illumination. There she distinctly saw the plants at the window of the Green-house, and they were bright, even at that distance, with a thousand blossoms. Nothing was there to hint of decay or death, and Lucy's heart leapt within her in the belief that many happy years might yet be in store for Emma Cranstoun.

Fearful as if she had been doing a thing that was wrong, Lucy glided up the steps that connected the Green-house with the southern lawn, and opened the door, which she had often unfolded to the beams of the morning sunshine. She wasted not a look, or if she did, it was hurried and indistinct, on the plants she had tended and trained; but with a beating heart, ventured into the room where Emma Cranstoun used to have her couch, and there, indeed, was the Lady lying as before, but with half shut eyes that opened as the shadow fell on them, for Lucy's feet were without a sound. Lucy stood trembling in the smile of recogni-

tion, bright, beaming, and benign as it ever had been, and to the heart now relieved from fear, even more perfectly beautiful in its forgivingness. "Come hither, my lovely and loving Lucy, come hither to my heart." And although nothing filled her outstretched arms, the soft white hand fell upon Lucy's head that leaned upon the couch, as the grateful creature knelt down and sobbed in her happiness too mournful to be endured.

Emma Cranstoun gave orders that no one, not even Mrs Ramsay, should disturb her, and listened with the deepest interest to Lucy's simple and innocent eloquence, when telling all she knew of the wickedness that had betrayed Mary Morrison. The power of truth was in every word, and Emma Cranstoun asked Lucy Forester's forgiveness. That request was something too overpoweringly affecting to a heart that looked up to her as to a superior being, and Lucy beseeched her to recal such words, for that it was impossible for her to do wrong, and that every one at Bracken-Braes had all along said that, till Mary's character was cleared, no one from the family could ever dare to show their face at the Hirst. "But last night I had a foretaste of this happiness in a dream, and will henceforth believe that dreams are sent from heaven."

Lucy knew that her benefactress must not be allowed to speak much in her exhausted condition, and feared that she had sorely wearied her by exciting too many feelings for Mary Morrison. "Say not so, my Lucy, for you have placed my pillow so, that the most

delightful rest is over my whole frame, and that voice of thine is the best of all restoratives." All apprehension of displeasure now wore away, and Lucy kept her seat by the side of the couch, or obeyed the Lady's bidding at word or sign, in all the little arrangements about the room, with the same noiseless alacrity that she had learned long ago, when first her Father had been stricken blind, and that made her indeed, in sober truth, a ministering angel at a sick-bed.

It was, however, impossible for Lucy not to see that the frame of her mistress was weaker, and more emaciated than before, and that her voice had a fainter—almost a hollow sound. Alive as she was to hope in all sorrow, yet she never foolishly shut her eyes to the truth, merely because it was distressing; and the truth now too plainly was, that Emma Cranstoun was not so well as she had been a few weeks ago. Lucy, therefore, did not wait to be asked to remain at the Hirst, but implored permission. "If Mrs Ramsay dislikes me, and still objects on Mary's account to my being here, Oh! send for Mr Kennedy, and ask his advice as to the propriety of your Lucy being again allowed to be your servant. Perhaps Mrs Ramsay will not dislike or condemn it, if Mr Kennedy says it is not wrong. Then my cousin Martha is one of the best-hearted, most obliging girls that ever was known, and indeed is far more useful about the house than I am, do what I will. They will miss me now less than ever—and, oh! what a relief to poor Mary Morrison's heart to

know that the Lady of the Hirst has taken me into her service once more, in spite of all that ever was said against her in her affliction and her innocence."

The snow was falling thickly, and the afternoon had become full of gusts, the tree-tops bending low, and their red leaves careering in eddies. Lucy wrote a letter with her own hand to her father, for she had always addressed him in her correspondence since she could write at all, telling in a few words that the Lady of the Hirst had forgiven them, even Mary Morrison herself; and although Mrs Ramsay's natural temper was not the best in the world, and her judgments not a little warped, yet her intentions were good, and before night she had brought herself to regard Lucy with not a little kindness. A good share of trouble, too, was about to be taken off her own hands, although, to do the good Lady justice, she never grudged trouble, fond as she was of descanting on her meritorious services; and having the sincerest affection for Emma, who, without sacrificing any of her own independence, always treated the old Lady with respect, she was even happy to think that there was now a young person whom Emma loved constantly with her; so that she gave orders, with a pleasant countenance, about Lucy's bed, that had been removed, but was now soon wheeled with its pretty curtains into its niche in the wall, and to Emma's eye gave the whole room an instant look of cheerfulness that already, in some measure, restored her heart.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

As soon as it was known that the Lady of the Hirst had restored Lucy Forester to her favour, and thereby declared her approbation of her father's conduct in the melancholy affair of Mary Morrison, that unfortunate creature's situation was regarded in a very different light by all the firesides in the parish. Innocence will be vindicated at last, and every heart that has been conscious of cruelty or injustice to a fellow-creature, is afterwards fain to make amends by additional tenderness and commiseration. Mary was not long of discerning a decided change in the expression of almost all countenances, and life that had for some time been a burden, was not only lightened, but a stealing sense of happiness came over her worn-out heart, and her eyes were able once more not only to endure, but to enjoy the sunshine.

Michael Forester did not proceed rashly in his determination to establish proofs of Mary's marriage with Mark Thornhill, but he allowed the truth gradually to be brought out almost of its own accord. One of the

witnesses, he found, had gone beyond seas, but the other, a woman of indifferent character, he had traced to Edinburgh, and there was a certainty of his bringing the nefarious conspiracy to light, when the hand of Providence itself was stretched out in the cause of the innocent. Mark Thornhill was stopped short in his wickedness by a mortal fever, and on his dying bed, remorse urged him to a full confession. Mary Morrison he acknowledged to be his lawful wife, and in a few days afterwards she was a widow.

Released from ignominy and disgrace, Mary now yielded herself up to the deepest grief, for, in spite of all his merciless barbarity, she felt that she had still continued to love Mark Thornhill. His death-bed repentance, whatever others might think of its severity, was accepted of by her as far more than an atonement for all the sins he had committed against her peace, and had it pleased God to spare his life, she would have been willing to have been taken to his bosom, and to have shown how perfect could be the forgiveness of a Christian wife. The time surely once was when he had loved her, nor could any thing ever efface from her remembrance the impressions of his tenderness to her in the first season of their love, when, probably, he designed no evil, and spoke the truth, when he said that he loved her for her modesty and her innocence. A dreadful change had indeed ensued, and she had become the victim of a wickedness that he himself had not known to be in his heart, till gradually it had ris-

en up in greater and greater power, and driven him at last to the very verge of inexpiable crime. Mary Morrison had been taught, and truly taught by the stern Calvinism of her own father, that the human heart is desperately wicked, and now that her husband was dead, she judged him in the light of that awful doctrine, and saw in his miserable guilt that of fallen and corrupted nature. Above all other considerations, he had now been called to judgment, and she humbly hoped, not without many inevitable, although perhaps unavailing prayers, that as great sinners as he may have been ransomed into the mercy of the Eternal.

But gracious nature would not suffer Mary to remain long utterly disconsolate. The calm of the grave, so very profound, soon began to inspire her with a congenial tranquillity, and the melancholy creature, not yet eighteen years of age, walked about the quiet retirement of Bracken-Braes, in her widow's weeds, with a composure that promised a life of sufficient happiness to one so contented and resigned. Her early youth had suffered the sorrows that belong to advanced age, but, although the light of joy had been sorely darkened, it was not for ever eclipsed, and might yet shine upon her steadily, if not brightly, at Ewebank, in her father's house, if that door was again to be opened to one who ought never to have been driven from its shelter.

Abraham Morrison had shown himself to be what every body now called an unnatural father. But had

he been really so, and had God frowned at all times upon his grey head since that evening when he cursed his child away from the hut in which she had been born? In that dark and disturbed tumult of many passions, He who framed the heart may have seen what was hidden from human eyes, for He alone judges aright in his omniscience the secrets that wring the souls of the children of men. That unforgiving father had not been altogether deserted in his childless hut. Many a thousand times in the darkness of midnight, or the worse darkness of the unvisited day, had every shadow of anger left his wrinkled face, and every feeling of anger flown far away from his heart.

Tossed had his exhausted frame been in such solitary seasons, like a bark upon the sea, when every living thing has left the wreck. Often and often had he risen up, like one walking in his sleep, and implored God to send him back his child—kissed the pillow on which her once innocent cheek had lain, and recalled every curse he had ever imprecated against her, with ten-fold destruction on his own unhappy head. But then evil whisperings came close by his ear from every corner of the dark dwelling—fingers pointed at him scornfully, and the eyes of the whole congregation, as they sat in God's own house turned upon him, the father of her who had sold herself to sin and to shame. In his half-waking dreams there was a hissing as of serpents; and a hand-writing on the lowly walls, instigated him in his delirium to keep this outcast sinner

under the pursuing vengeance of a father's ban. Then the long habits of an unindulgent, indeed an unforgiving spirit, strengthened the power of all these phantasms; and thus fighting against all the most sacred emotions and instincts which were often victorious, and as often overcome, he had sunk into a sort of insanity, which is the more dreadful, because its victim believes himself to be obeying, not only the law of nature, but the command of a superior and inexorable power.

Michael Forester knew the character of Mary's father well, and had not forgotten the last parting scene at Ewebank. Therefore, after her complete vindication by the side of her husband's death-bed, he still advised her to remain with them at Bracken-Braes till a fit time might come for reconciliation. Neighbours were told to step in upon Abraham now and then at Ewebank, and by their more free and cheerful manner of talking, to show that a change was taking place in the opinions of all respecting his daughter. Ere long, something like the full truth was revealed to him by successive glimpses, and Michael at last ventured to send a message to him by a person whom he greatly respected, that he would in a few days come over to Ewebank, and he trusted not to leave it till he had convinced his friend that Mary, who had surely been a wife, and was now a widow, ought to be taken back without any upbraidings into her father's house.

Michael Forester chose the Sabbath-day for this work

of love and righteousness. Agnes and Isobel accompanied him to Ewebank, and they all three walked silently and solemnly into the room where Abraham was sitting, with the open Bible before him, and the old pauper reading her's likewise in a nook by herself, for a while unobservant of their entrance. Abraham, although too weak to walk to the kirk, even although his unhappy feelings had suffered him to do so, was decently clad in his Sabbath apparel, and being prepared for a visit, received them with surprising fortitude. "I again ask a blessing upon this house," said Michael, and these few words were heard efficaciously in the silence. The aged attendant placed her spectacles in her Bible, and walked out of the hut. Then Abraham felt his conscience smite him like a death-knell, for the presence of those who had received his daughter into their house when her father would have driven her out even into the winter's snow, dispelled all those distempered thoughts by which he had blinded his moral understanding, and he knew that he had sinned against nature and against God. "My bairn will never forgive me—though meek Mary Morrison was aye the name she bore—for didna you see, Mr Forester—no, you saw it not, for the Almighty, who burned out your eyes with his lightning, saved them from that pollution—but your Lucy saw it, and I wish you all to hear me confess it with my wicked grey hairs in the dust—your Lucy beheld this hand, which yet may wither in the unquenched fire, smite my daughter as she knelt before me—aye, smite

her on the temples, till, without one groan, she stretched herself out like a corpse upon this very floor." At these words Abraham Morrison laid down his head in the white ashes on the hearth, and sprinkled them over it, saying, "Is this remorse, is this repentance, or must I feed the worm that never dies, and for me shall my Saviour have in vain been nailed upon the tree?"

No one moved—but they suffered the passion of the contrite man to take its course. Then said Isobel, "Fear not, my friend, but that this Sabbath shall indeed be unto thee a day of rest. Even at this very hour is the Psalm perhaps rising to the throne of God from the Kirk of Ferns, in which, although for some time absent, you have been for many long years a worshipper. In that congregation you will yet sit with Mary at your side, happier than you have been for many hundred Sabbaths—nor, Abraham, is your daughter even now far distant from you—she and Lucy are on the hillside looking down upon the dwelling in which she long thought herself happy, and below whose roof fain is she with a loving heart once more to return!"

Agnes had gone quietly out of the room when Abraham had given way to that fit of passion, and she now came back, but not unaccompanied, for Mary Morrison in deep mourning walked in with her and Lucy, and then advancing a few steps, stood before her father. There was no agitation on her countenance, for her soul was prepared for this meeting, and it had gone through such sorrows that it was now found equal to any trial. She

came not to forgive but to be forgiven, and in a calm low voice asked if her father would take back to his bosom his repentant child. Her face was quite pale, but also quite happy—it did not seem that she trembled—and as her father stood motionless with his hands before his eyes, Mary walked up to him with wonderful composure, and putting her arms round his neck, kissed his cheek almost as placidly as if on returning home from an annual visit to a friend's house, and then leaned upon his breast, half supporting and half supported by him who had held her up in baptism, joyful in the smiles of his first-born.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The winter sometimes passes away as if that season of the year had been imperceptibly blended with the autumn and the spring, and from December to April the earth lies with little diminutiou of its cheerful character below the beautiful uncertain weather. In a pastoral country of hills such months are especially pleasant. All the small rivulets are kept perpetually alive and transparent in their grassy or pebbly beds—the flocks feeding on the braes repose white in the fitful sunshine, just as in the warmth of summer—and frequently the whole air is filled with insects sent up from the rushes, or crevices of the rocks in their ephemeral festivals. If here and there in the clefts on the mountain tops some patches of snow are seen, they serve only to make the faded verdure of the pastures below appear brighter—the little moorland birds are heard twitterring long before Valentine's day—and the flocks of fieldfares are more shy than when in severe storms they alighted among the drifts, and could with difficulty find their food on the winter fallows.

Then, at the time of merry Christmas neighbours have to find their way to each others' houses by more circuitous paths, according to the position of the bridges, for no stream is frozen, and perhaps the low-lands are flooded or full of pools like the sea-shore at the flowing tide. The crowing cocks are distinctly heard in the calm from house to house to a great distance, and from the hill-side the shepherd can count a hundred wreaths of smoke seemingly settled for hours together, so breathless is the atmosphere beneath the blue firmament and all its fleecy clouds.

Such had been the character of this open winter in the parish of Holylee, and not a homestead within all its bounds more enjoyed the temperate season, or looked more beautiful under its variable colourings, than Bracken-Braes. Indeed there had scarcely been a single day since Lucy went to the Hirst on which the family could not sit below the Plane-Tree. Its hard healthy buds seemed impatient for the full spring, while the lilacs and horse-chesnuts all the way down the avenue, when tinged by the sunlight, were, in the early part of February, as far forward as they had sometimes been at the middle of March. The primroses showed themselves, as it seemed, almost before the glory of the last year's garden-flowers was forgotten, and the geraniums and myrtles were oftener left out on the sloping bank for hours together, than they had ever been in any one's remembrance. There had even been blossoms on the fruit-trees before the earliest bird

had begun to build its nest, and that earliest bird was the thrush, that again hung its cradle in the Traveller's Joy, descending like often altered drapery over the parlour-window.

Michael and Agnes were without their Lucy, and yet they had never been more perfectly happy. Always on the Sabbaths she came into her father's seat in the kirk, and sometimes went with them to Bracken-Braes, walking over to the Hirst before dark, or in the moonlight. The dear stranger thus continually restored her parents' hearts, and carried her real presence in upon the cherished image of her absent beauty. Every Sabbath Agnes and Isobel thought they discerned some new sweetness in her appearance or manner—as for Michael, he desired but to hear her voice, and was satisfied. Martha, in whose disposition envy or jealousy had no place, and who now felt that she owed every day new obligations to her uncle and aunt, was at no pains to conceal her admiration of her incomparable cousin, and knew that she could not more acceptably prove her gratitude.

But in no other house, for many miles round, had there been such a change for the better in all things as at Ewebank. It had not pleased Providence to grant to Mary Morrison, in her early widowhood, the comfort that breathes from the cradle, for her baby died almost as soon as born; but Mary considered that affliction as part of the punishment of her disobedience. Herself deceived by her unhappy husband, she had been pre-

vailed upon by him to deceive her father, and she had lived sorely to rue that clandestine and irregular marriage. Her father was now an altered man indeed—patient, even mild—and under the power of a pious penitence. The change had not been imposed upon him from without, and therefore liable to other change and relapse, but it had been worked out by his own spirit fighting with itself, the better part finally triumphant. Pride, stubbornness, and a wilful hardihood, had been his besetting sins; but now all these were gone, and Abraham Morrison was gentle as a child to her who had for so many years trembled at his frown, and loved him with a troubled heart. Besides, Abraham felt that he could not be a long liver, and every day seemed more and more anxious to make amends to Mary for all the evils which his former neglect or cruelty, far more than her own error, had brought upon her in those very years which nature holds privileged from any rueful distress. Sometimes when the sunshine broke suddenly in upon them sitting by the fireside, or as she was going about her work, with the constant approval of her father, Mary, in spite of her great misfortunes, felt a strong spirit of happiness expanding her bosom, and she would start to hear her own voice humming some cheerful air which perhaps she had warbled with Lucy Forester on the Gowan-Green.

It was the general opinion over all the parish, that Lucy Forester had saved the life of the Lady of the First. Even the proud and stately Mrs Ramsay, who

with difficulty could bring herself to see either merit, beauty, or virtue in any one of what she called plebeian birth, had been drawn against her will into an affection for her, and treated Lucy with all the kindness that her peculiar manners would permit. Emma Cranstoun had, during the whole winter, been exactly in that precarious state, in which any neglect, or even injudicious care, might have proved fatal, and in which, even the silence of unaccompanied solitude might have insupportably weighed down her spirits to death. But Lucy was always with her, and that was enough, whether mute or speaking; her looks, motions, and words, were all timed and measured and toned by the nicest observations that a naturally fine mind could make under the influence of affection, and not only no touch, but no breath even was too rudely applied to the Lady's frame that, like the leaf of the sensitive plant, would have shrunk into a tremor at the slightest violence, during that illness in which the immortal soul may be stricken into anguish by a cloud darkening the day, or the leaves rustling against the window. From November till May, Emma Cranstoun had never left her room; but now the summer was again at hand, and in a few weeks she was to leave the Hirst, and seek new strength in the air of Italy. Mrs Ramsay was to take her, for at least a year, to Genoa, Florence, or Pisa—the Hirst was to lose its Lady—and Lucy Forester to return to Bracken-Braes.

Emma Cranstoun did not despair of herself; and although the idea of taking Lucy with her to Italy had certainly not only passed across her mind, but even taken possession of it, she knew that it would be impossible to do so without cruel injustice to her parents. Michael Forester was perfectly happy, no doubt, in his blindness, but then he could not live, were Lucy away in a foreign country, while to Agnes, whose health was by no means strong, her departure would seem like death. The Lady felt that Lucy had done all the duties to her that nature and religion could approve, and was ready with even a hopeful cheerfulness to embark on a voyage to that beautiful land to which so many have sailed to drop their bodies into a foreign grave.

It was a sad day among all the hills of Holylee and Ferns, when Emma Cranstoun was to leave the Hirst. Never did June breathe a more beautiful summer than had been deepening the umbrage of these old woods, and clothing even their shadiest recesses with a profusion of wild flowers. The year was in its perfection—yet the Hirst was in one hour to be darkened. Emma Cranstoun, who had many friends to bid farewell to from the houses of all the gentry, far and near, who came that day to the Hirst, not on idle ceremony, but with sincerest sorrow, took Lucy an hour before her departure into that Green-house, now filled with odorous balm, and the brightness of a thousand intermingled blossoms, and joining in a prayer which they

had often before repeated together, they there separated in silence—Emma going to join her friends in the drawing-room, and Lucy to her father and mother who were in the great hall.

The Lady of the Hirst soon appeared gliding down the wide stair-case, and walked to her carriage through the midst of the whole tenantry. There was Michael Forester with his head uncovered, and Agnes weeping many tears—but Agnes was not the only one who wept, for there were orphans and widows in that crowd;—and they who had no cause to shed tears from any afflictions in their own lot, could not withhold them when the young, the beautiful, the charitable, and the pious was seen taking her departure from the house of her forefathers—to a foreign country, too probably never more to return.

CHAPTER XXXV.



In a few weeks Lucy received a letter from Emma Cranstoun, written on the eve of embarkation, in a hopeful spirit, and if she read it once, she did so a hundred times, in the room beside her parents, in her own small retreat, beneath the Plane-Tree, up upon the hill-side, and on the Gowan-Green half-way to the Hirst, whose extensive woods were visible from that eminence. The hand-writing was firmer, Lucy thought, than usual, and she inspected the form of every syllable, that she might guess the degree of strength possessed by the dear hand that traced the affectionate words. There were no melancholy fears or forebodings expressed, and Lucy, before even the Lady of the Hirst had perhaps left the shores of England, already anticipated her return in restored and established health. Letters too were coming occasionally from Ellesmere; not that Ruth Colinson, or any one of the whole family at the Vicarage, were shining or frequent correspondents, but, once in the three months or so, a Westmoreland letter did arrive—and then the word "Ken-

dal" imprinted with villanous post-office type, and ink more villanous still, across the superscription, always brought to Lucy's eyes a smile of cordial delight. The Colinsons never forgot Martha, but sent her all the news they could gather about the old people with whom she had lived, and all her humble acquaintances; and the sound of the familiar names of persons and places took her back again, in short dreams, to the wooded neighbourhood of Hawkshead, and its pretty Lake of Esthwaite, illustrious alike for its pike, its perch, its plovers, and its poetry. For Mr Thomson, the Bard of Saury, had sung Martha's departure to Scotland, which he described as an isle far off in the great seas, and remarkable, as it was indeed naturally to be expected, for the multitude and majesty of its Scottish pines.

Lucy and Martha were both out, at some distance from the house, when an elderly stranger, of very gentlemanly exterior, walked into the room, and courteously saluted Agnes and Michael. In a few minutes he told his name—the father of Edward Ellis. The manner of all present was in an instant changed from hospitable civility into the most respectful attention, and many were the inquiries about the health and happiness of the youth, who had so often cheered with his conversation and laughter the roof of Bracken-Braes. But it was soon somewhat painfully observed, even by the Blind Man, that Mr Ellis's tone was cold and constrained, and that he was far from meeting with

sympathy their eager and heartfelt interrogations. "My son was at Rome when last I heard of him, and I believe he will remain in Italy at least another year, when probably he will visit Greece."

The chilling influence of Mr Ellis's manner and discourse soon froze Michael, Agnes, and Isobel into unaccustomed silence. But the mystery of such apparently uncalled for superciliousness was soon explained. "Mr Forester, from any thing I can hear from Mr Kennedy, you are an upright man, and may be confided in—and, therefore, Sir, I have taken the liberty of visiting you in your own house, which, perhaps, you may at present be thinking rather an intrusion—but the truth is, that—that I was some time ago made very uneasy about my son Edward—you will pardon, because you can understand a father's anxieties, Mr Forester—about my son Edward, Mr Forester, and your daughter, her name I believe is Lucy.—Now that the ice is broken, Mr Forester, I may say that the remotest chance of my son forming such a connection could not fail of being most distressing—most agonizing—and I trust in God, that you will deal openly and honourably with me, and declare if there be anything like an engagement—an engagement of marriage—for there is no use in reasoning the matter between those foolish children, foolish is the word I use, for, from your daughter's very tender age, I feel persuaded that there is no occasion for a term of severer reprehension."

Michael Forester was almost entirely unprepared for

such a speech as this—for although assuredly now and then he had thought it very likely that Edward Ellis, in the full flow of youthful enthusiasm, might admire, even love his Lucy, yet judging justly of that high-souled boy, he never had suffered the thought to give him one moment's serious uneasiness, well knowing that his daughter's innocence was as safe in her simplicity with Edward Ellis, as if she had been his sister; and that any love that might subsist between young hearts, in such very different conditions of life, would be little more than that emotion of common humanity, which, where the mutual objects are worthy, may not only harmlessly but happily unite in friendship those whom destiny must soon not only part, but keep for ever separated, except in slight and transient intercourse on the paths of life onwards even to the very grave. But there was something not only in Mr Ellis's words, but in the tone in which they were delivered, to which Michael Forester, poor man, and blind as he was, had never been accustomed, and raising himself up with natural dignity in his chair, he said, with a gravity almost austere, "My daughter, Sir, is little more than a child—but since such a word as marriage has indeed been coupled with the innocent's name, be assured, Sir, that my Lucy would not leave her blind father's side, if I only put my hand upon her head—thus—not for all the rank and riches in the land, although poverty, want, disease and

death were in all their ghastliness on the floor of this house."

The language of Michael on all occasions of any seriousness or importance, was perfectly that of a man of education—in nothing vulgar—and not ineloquent in its simple and straight-forward phrase,—at once clear and emphatic. Mr Ellis, who although a good and honourable, was in intellect a very ordinary man, had not been prepared for such an interview, and felt the artificial authority of his mere rank giving way beneath the ascendancy of natural endowments. The erect and commanding frame of the Blind Man, composedly seated in his chair, with one hand upon his staff, as if about to raise himself up into a standing posture,—his strongly marked, but far from harsh features, animated by sudden emotion beyond the calm of that habitual thoughtfulness which the loss of sight had induced—his manifest contentment with his lot, which so surrounded as he was, indeed scarcely seemed one of great hardship,—his pride, or some state of the soul of a more sacred character, in his dutiful and devoted child,—the affecting solemnity of his motions and gestures, every one of which slightly betrayed a sense of his comparative helplessness and dear dependence on those to whom Heaven's light was not denied,—and along with all these, a deference which he seemed not unwilling to show towards one who, he had been informed, was greatly his superior in rank, as well as the

courteous kindness which he owed to a guest below his own roof, and that guest the father of Edward Ellis,—one and all of these things, separate or united, gave the stranger a sudden knowledge of something existing in lowly life, of which he had never had any suspicion, and in presence of which he felt abashed—humbled—and changed in a moment from the arrogant and dictatorial superior into an inferior called upon not to teach but to learn, not to command but to obey. Mr Ellis, although confused and confounded, attempted to rally his spirits, and after a few words of common-place compliment, said that his purse was at Mr Forester's service. Michael, although a poor man, was as independent in his circumstances as any man in all Scotland; and if ever he had been at all worldly-minded, and perhaps all people of very energetic character, when toiling either in mind or body for the good of their family, are apt to become somewhat too much so, he had long ceased to err in that direction, for blindness had made him something better than a philosopher, and he had found the golden mean in moderate desires and a cheerful faith. Michael did not even condescend to notice what Mr Ellis had now said, but he indulged an allowable pride in alluding to himself and his condition. "Do you think, Mr Ellis, that in poor men's huts, the best natural affections do not reside in as great force and purity as in the dwellings of the rich or noble? Is not my Lucy as dear to me, and for the self-same reasons, as your Edward is to his

father, and a finer boy never stepped across a poor man's threshold? You have hopes—just hopes of your son—and may God in his goodness cause them all amply to be fulfilled. You act rightly in this matter. Your son must marry a wife in the same rank of life with himself—Lucy Forester is but the daughter of a peasant. These eyes of mine, Sir, have not seen for upwards of five years—and the last time I beheld my Lucy, she was a fairy of a thing, that still slept in her mother's bosom. But although beauty be but a fading, I do not say a worthless flower, and although I have better gifts to delight me in my Lucy than any beauty that ever shone on maiden's countenance, yet they say my daughter is like the mother that bore her,—and there Agnes—there my wife sits before you—and judge for yourself if I would exchange my lot with that of any other man living—blind though my eyes be as the floor beneath your feet."

In the silence that succeeded this impassioned appeal, Lucy Forester came singing into the room, with her hair sportively wreathed with a garland of wild-flowers, and on seeing the stranger, stood suddenly fixed with all her glowing beauty, in one of Nature's most graceful attitudes on the floor of the lowly hut. "Lucy—this is Mr Edward Ellis's father," said Aunt Isobel, anxious that the blush that already mantled over her brow, cheek, and eyes, might conceal her emotion. Lucy dropt a curtsey, with her heart beating like a frightened bird in its cage, and had just

strength to seat herself on the stool by her father's knee.

Her father put his hand upon her head, from which she had just released the garland of flowers that fell at her feet, letting all her rich golden ringlets flow unconfined, and requested Mr Ellis to speak, that, before a word was said to Lucy, he might judge for himself how she received the communication. But Mr Ellis was dazzled with the beauty of the peasant's daughter, and at the same time persuaded by its uncommon sweetness that she was altogether artless and innocent—his naturally kind and considerate character recovered itself from an unnecessary, if not an unworthy fear, and he felt that it would be at once coarse and cruel even to allude to his son after what he had heard and now saw of all the inmates of Bracken-Braes. All that he said or did was to put a letter from Edward into Lucy's hand, with a few words of kindness; and she, unable to endure the scene any longer, flew out into the open air, and almost without knowing whither her steps were carrying her, followed the stream down—down to the Linn—and the Howlet's-Nest, where Edward had first learned to meet her by accident two summers ago,—summers, alas! how swiftly flown, and never to be equalled in beauty, and in delight, long as that sun should shine in Heaven.

The waterfall was cheering the solitary dell with its foaming murmurs, but Lucy saw—heard it not—or if she did, 'twas like something sounding and gleaming in

an imperfect dream. She leant, sick and blind, against the ivy-tree—and at last opened the letter, in which she felt she was to read something for ever fatal to her happiness. There were not many lines—and kind—perfectly kind they were—but still they were charged with meaning not to be misunderstood. Thenceforth Edward Ellis was to be nothing to her—but a name, a thought, a shadow—and as for herself, never more would her image come before his eyes as he roamed over foreign lands, or sailed on the bosom of the wide sea. Lucy Forester wept in grief—love—perhaps anger—shall it be said—despair? She went to the edge of the Pool, and taking from her bosom the keepsakes Edward had given her at the Hawkstane Spring, she dropped them one by one into the deep water—all—all but one, which would not leave her hand, the brooch which contained his dark glossy hair, with two names engraved upon it—"Edward to Lucy." She took out the hair—and then the dearest memorial of all sunk to the bottom of the Linn. Now, indeed, the dream was broken, like a foam-bell upon the flowing waters. Not till this moment had she been completely undeceived. Yet there had been no deceit—no faithlessness—no falsehood. Ignorant of themselves—their present condition—and their future lot, had Edward and Lucy been in the joy of their mutual affection. He had first come to see the impossibility of their ever being more to one another than they had already been—and now Lucy saw the same truth with the same sad conviction.

"Vain creature that I was, and void of all understanding, ever to dream for a single time in my sleep that Edward Ellis was all his life long to love Lucy Forester! And yet often—too often have I dreamt it, and lo! he has passed away from Holylee—from Bracken-Braes—from the Linn and the Ivy-tree like a cloud—and I shall never see his bonny face again till my dying day!" But as her tears flowed, her thoughts grew less and less bitter. She now began to recal all the delightful traits of his character, and to her unselfish nature that meditation brought an alleviation of grief. How courteous had he ever been in the cottage! How tenderly polite to her mother, how more than respectful to her father, how pleasant to Aunt Isobel! But all at once she tore herself away from the trysting-place, and said within her heart that she would never more venture to revisit it—for all its beauty, all its blessedness was gone, just as the indescribable brightness of some too heavenly dream, that is felt at the time to be but a dream, and long long after, when it returns in indistinct remembrance on the soul, sheds something of its yet unextinguished light over the dim, and clouded, and imperfect happiness of this waking world!

Lucy looked at Bracken-Braes—but Edward Ellis's father might still be sitting there—and she dared not—could not again meet his face, even in the gloaming. So she sat down among the broom, and did not go home till the Plane-Tree was standing quite visible in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LONG before Christmas Lucy Forester was happy as a lark in heaven, that cares not for a few clouds, and often is heard singing when there is little or no sunshine. Idleness is the great bane both of virtue and happiness, but she was never idle, and putting at all times her whole heart and soul even into the most trifling occupations, there was literally no time for regret or repining at Bracken-Braes. Perhaps it might have seemed to those persons who love to indulge themselves in useless sorrows, that Lucy was a girl of no stedfast affections, since she could so easily get rid of all mournful remembrances about Edward Ellis. But how could human life proceed at all, except in despondency and care, if the heart of the innocent were for ever to retain its afflictions? Losses, troubles, and death invade every dwelling on earth, but there are few dwellings in which nevertheless there may not be contentment. Fleeting as human joys too often are, perhaps they are not more so than human griefs; and, at all events, it can never be a

duty to brood over recollections that enfeeble our fortitude, even although they may relate to the best and surest sympathies of nature.

But while all was cheerfulness at Bracken-Braes, there were sorrows in a worthy neighbour's house, that greatly affected Michael Forester and his whole family. Their good friends, the Maynes at Ladyside, had for a considerable time past suffered the very sorest distress that can enter within the doors of a house. Isaac, the scholar, the youth whose surprising genius had been the glory of the parish of Holylee, had missed his way in the world, the broad and shining way of truth and righteousness, and had brought himself to the very gates of death. Michael Forester had long suspected that his conduct had not been what might have been predicted of a boy so richly endowed with the gifts of nature. Jacob Mayne far seldomer spoke of his son than he had used to do, and never now with that pride which once kindled in his eyes at the slightest mention of his name. But truth could be concealed no longer—all Isaac's brightest prospects in life had been blasted by his own imprudence, follies, and vices, and he lay now in a hopeless condition within his father's house at Ladyside.

Who can estimate the blessings of education, when it comprehends within its range almost every dwelling in the land, and when all the most numerous families of the very poorest men, up even from the child of six years old to the grandsire of fourscore, can

read, and in due measure understand the word of God, and the written commentaries of man? From the humblest huts in such a country come sometimes forth in power the illuminators of the race; while all the ordinary ongoings of life partake of a loftier character among those who pass unknown to the grave, along the quiet paths that all end there as well as the paths of glory. Generations do not then disappear merely like the leaves, but theirs is an undying spirit that pervades future time, and invigorates the whole frame of social life, thus continually increasing in strength and beauty. But even this blessing is not without that alloy which mingles with all that is most excellent in man's estate. How many that might have been safe in their simplicity employ knowledge to their own destruction! Feelings in their origin pure and high, often catch in their progress a taint of corruption—imagination often dazzles to betray—and genius itself, the most envied gift of Heaven, has it not too often conducted to guilt, despair, and death!

So had it been with poor Isaac Mayne. In earliest boyhood, when sitting on the brae herding the sheep, to him had whisperings come of a world of thought that lies for ever unknown to the ordinary peasant. He saw a beauty in every little wild flower, in the structure of every blade of grass glowing with its dewdrops, and in the drooping branches of the birch-trees imaged peacefully in the unsullied water they overshadowed, which he bore within his spirit like an un-

communicated secret, a very burden of delight which there was no one to share with him in his solitude, Unassisted by advice, and led as it were by some sacred instinct, Isaac, before he was twelve years old, had pored over many books, in which his own keen and bright genius enabled him to interpret the character which, as his intellect expanded, all seemed as full of hidden meanings as hieroglyphics. Then the young enthusiast left his native hut, and walked into the bewildering world of thought. But as he became familiar with all those ideal regions, he was at the same time surrounded, tried, and tempted by wants, cares, desires, hopes, and passions that spring from flesh and blood, course along the veins, and all unwearied with their ceaseless journeyings, come and go from the beating or the boiling heart. Isaac, as he stood on the verge of manhood, felt that there was truth in the fiction, that man has, indeed, two souls. On the wings of the one he soared into regions so pure and high, that he seemed to float above this earth and all its bewildered scenery, like an eagle aloft in the stainless ether—but on the feet of the other, made of gold and clay, he walked through haunts where danger lures on in the shape of delight, till at last sin boldly meets her guest with undisguised lineaments, and stamps upon his very conscience, as with a searing-iron, the brand by which she at once recognizes and claims all those who have sold themselves for the price of her irresistible allurements.

Yet it was long—very long—after his first great

lapses, before such a youth as Isaac Mayne could be degraded by the permanent dominion of vulgar vices. The fineness of his native genius saved him from many pollutions to which coarse natures are prone. But no happiness of natural constitution can guard its possessor from worse and worse evils, when the eye of conscience has been darkened or shut, and when religion has evaporated into a mere imaginative feeling, or been narrowed into a cold conviction of the understanding. Therefore Isaac became at last little better than a vulgar sensualist—the disorder in his spirit disordered his whole life—his duties were either neglected or despised —his character, month after month, received a darker die—and not only conscious of what he now was, but aware of what he might have been, he finally flung from him the hope and the desire of restoration, and was willing, in the dawn of his youthful prime, to shut his eyes for ever on a world which had been spread in its beauty before him, only, as it now seemed, that he might disfigure and profane all its most holy charms, and carry with him to the grave the miserable remembrance of talents misemployed or thrown away, and of aspirations that once owned no other source than Heaven, sunk now to the level of the lowest creatures that crawl upon the earth.

What could his ignorant father, his simple-minded mother, and his homely sisters, now know of the sufferings of Isaac Mayne? They saw him for some weeks wandering like a ghost about the doors, and then tak-

ing to his bed in silence, refusing sustenance, and sullenly shunning all concern even with his parents. His were failings they could neither understand nor assuage. Their kindnesses were directed to things that, in Isaac's eyes, were now less than nothing—for what signified to him a smooth pillow, food or medicine brought with weeping eyes and the tenderest hand, or the silencing of the wheel, and of every, the least noise in that small house! Isaac cared not about his bed, for spread it as his mother might, to him it was a bed of iron, and strewn with thorns—poison would to him have been more acceptable than any food, and there were sounds in his spirit that would not cease, louder and more alarming than the winter storm. Jacob knew not where to turn for comfort, seeing that his son's reason's was impaired, but next to Mr Kennedy he looked for relief, if relief there could be, to Michael Forester.

Michael had sometimes, in his solitary meditations, thought that perhaps some day Isaac Mayne might make Lucy his wife. Many things must escape the knowledge of the most intelligent of the blind; and in this case Michael had been greatly deceived in the character of him whom he continued to esteem and admire long after almost all others had begun to regard it with more than suspicion. He was even occasionally displeased with Lucy for her indifference or dislike to Isaac Mayne, and he hoped that as she grew up, and saw more clearly and widely into her condition, that

her heart might be changed, and favourably inclined towards one of whom he entertained so high an opinion. But Lucy had noticed many things in Isaac that turned her from him with feelings stronger than she wished to indulge towards any human being, for her eye, quick in her innocence, had seen that Isaac was an undutiful son, and treated both his father and mother with disrespect. Lucy had not been mistaken in these observations, for when once the soul of a man has stooped to any single meanness, another and another will not only work in of itself, but will be dragged over his whole conduct by the very circumstances of life. Isaac had become ashamed of his poor parents—and there were situations, in which it is more than probable he would have disowned them because of their homely manners and appearance. The time had been when he was proud to walk to the kirk with his hard-working father, and to stand hand in hand with him in the little friendly ring of Christians at the door, before the bell began to tinkle, or Mr Kennedy appeared. But he had had the wretched weakness to attach a painful importance to the idle words that he had since occasionally heard in town-talk about low birth—humble origin—plebeian blood—and so forth—expressions which are never heard from the lips of high-born men, but not unfamiliar to the mouths of the mean in nature or condition—and he had almost unconsciously allowed himself to form unwarranted associations of every thing most worthy of being admired and imitated with a cer-

tain rank in life—so that it even pained him to think on the low and thatch-roofed cabin, as it might be called, in which he was born and bred; and it would have brought the red colour into his face, to have acknowledged, in some companies, his humble but honest origin. When he thought on his mother even, and all his sisters working in the harvest field, or busy in the byre or the dairy, and then considered where he might then be sitting among ladies and gentlemen, into whose society his distinguished genius and talents had procured him a ready admission, and who most assuredly, at least all of them whose good opinion was worth having, did not admire him the less because they indeed knew that he was the son of a peasant, Isaac Mayne had often felt foolishly humbled in his own estimation —so nearly allied are meanness and pride! What high satisfaction was thus lost to this youth's soul! For to have striven as he had done, was indeed glorious, and his imagination, under the impulse and guidance of nobler principles and feelings, might have visited in its dreams the braes of Holylee, as the only paradise on earth, and his father's lowly mansion at Ladyside as the very centre of that paradise, from which would have streamed a light that need never to have been darkened before the eyes of filial reverence.

Both Agnes and Lucy had once been witness to a scene in the church-yard of Holylee, at the close of Divine Service, after which neither of them had been able to regard Isaac Mayne with their former affection. Sever-

al ladies and gentlemen, who had been sitting in the seat of the Lady of the Hirst, in the little gallery, addressed Isaac on the dismissal of the congregation, when he was along with his parents and sisters. They had known him in Edinburgh, as a young man of genius, and were not aware that Holylee was his native parish. Isaac had then, under manifest uneasiness, separated himself from the decent home-groupe, of whom no man need have been ashamed; and to an inquiry from one of the party, who were the friends he had just left, his answer was vague, and implying, that his father, mother, and sisters might be to him almost strangers. Lucy could not help eyeing him with anger and disdain, while she thought for a moment of Edward Ellis; and then, going up to her Blind Father, walked with him through the crowd, in a pride known to herself alone, but in a beauty that attracted the gaze of all the strangers, who at once said to Emma Cranstoun, "There is no need to tell her name—your description, partial as it was, did not exceed the truth—she is indeed the Primrose of Bracken-Braes."

But all such remembrances were now dismissed from their minds, and Agnes and Lucy, no less than Michael, thought only on the fair side of Isaac's character. They went almost every forenoon to Ladyside; and Isaac, who, day after day, had become more indifferent to every thing about him, and almost wholly unobservant, asked if he could see Lucy Forester. His mother took Lucy to his bed-side—and Isaac's eyes, for a few

moments, recovered their fine intelligent expression, as they were lifted up towards her pale and weeping countenance. "God bless Lucy Forester!" said the dying youth—and his mother afterwards often assured Agnes that these were his last words. Yet Isaac lived on for two or three weeks without pain, but insensible to the world. The old shepherd dog, that had been fourteen years in the family, leapt up on his bed, but Isaac felt no disturbance. Had the flail been sounding in the near barn, it would have been unheard. "My poor soon, Mr Forester," said Jacob in a calm voice, "has for nearly a week been past hearing our evening psalm." "I am happy to know that you are so resigned, Jacob—your wife—and daughters too are, I think, composed." "Aye—aye—we have in a manner taken farewell of Isaac—for you see his mind is gone—but his soul has not yet been called away, and I will not give him the last kiss till he is dead." There was no one else in the room at this time but the two fathers; and Jacob Mayne, whose usual state of mind towards Michael Forester was that of reverence, now embraced him in a sudden burst of agony, and cried with a loud voice, "Pity me—pray for me—for Isaac—my darling Isaac—the life, and the light, and the pride of this house will never know his father's voice more!

CHAPTER XXXVII.



LADYSIDE was at all times rather a melancholy looking place, standing as it did at the very remotest end of the valley of the Heriot-Water, there an insignificant rivulet, and at a considerable distance from any other habitation. The high heather hills overshadowed it, but there were no trees, for the decayed and mossy stumps of a decayed forest could not be called trees; and Jacob Mayne had never been very well able with his narrow means, even if he had thought of it, to make any plantations either for ornament, or shelter to his cattle. Its mournful character was deepened on the day of Isaac's funeral, which was on one of those dim and silent forenoons that, in early spring, breathe a pensiveness over the air and the earth. No bleat of lambs was yet heard over the braes—the birds had not begun their carols—and the perfect silence was broken only by the sound of feet, as friend and neighbour, one after the other, at short intervals, were coming in to the funeral.

The company assembled in the kitchen, a wide low-

roofed room, with an ample chimney, in the corner of which, below the smoke-stained beam, Isaac Mayne had sat during many a long winter evening, conning over his book, to the delight of his proud father's heart, undisturbed in his studies by the noise of work or merriment. Mrs Mayne had, herself, with the assistance of Agnes, arranged all the seats that very morning, and every thing was decent and orderly about the room. Many an intelligent and thoughtful countenance, not a few of them with their foreheads sprinkled with grey hairs, were seen in that circle,—some wine and funeral-bread was handed round, and partaken of by all, after a prayer from Mr Kennedy—and then going into the open air, the company formed themselves behind the coffin, which had been placed on the Green before the door, and the procession moved down the valley.

Isaac's mother and sisters had, during the prayer, taken farewell, on the Green, of his mortal part, standing together with Agnes and Lucy; and as soon as the party left the door, weeping eyes followed it from the window in the thatch, down the stream, till round a small mount it disappeared.

The funeral company was a large one, for the Maynes were respected in the parish, and as for Isaac, his fame had spread far beyond its narrow bounds, and now that he had expiated even by death whatever faults he had committed, the grief that went with him to the grave was profound and universal. Many people who

could not be invited to the funeral, nevertheless came into the church-yard, and all clothed in mourning—the children of the village-school were drawn up in a line near the grave—and the low walls that enclosed that quiet place of burial were almost entirely covered with spectators, few of them indifferent to the solemn scene. Michael Forester, who, next to the father of the deceased, was chief mourner, stood close beside him when the coffin was lowered down, and grasped Jacob's hand when the first shovel-full of earth said, without man's words, "dust to dust."

The silent party dissolved, and in an hour or two most of them who had composed it went to their work in the fields. Michael went back with Jacob Mayne to Ladyside, and early in the afternoon the whole family sat down to their meal. There were not a great many tears, and such as fell at times were not very very bitter, for every heart had had time to prepare itself for weeks before Isaac's death, and now that his remains were given up to invisible decay, a calm came down from heaven upon the house, and life, although it had lost much, still had to them its blessings.

"Mr Forester," said Jacob, "many great kindnesses have we received at your hands—but this last is the greatest of them all—religion itself has been a mair unspeakable comfort to us all on this occasion, because of your Christian charity to the afflicted—and poor Isaac's mother there, last night when sairly distressed, and calling on God to comfort her, mentioned your

name, and your wife's and daughter's in her prayers. She is, as you know, a woman of few words, but there nae where lives ane wi' a mair grateful heart." Jacob then turned his eyes towards a little book-case that hung on the wall by a string fastened to a nail—and said, "That was the wark o' Isaac's ain hands before he was ten years old. Many and many an hour have I seen him at it, and an ingenious thing it is for so young a creature—these volumes were the first he ever bought—wi' his ain money too, for we were very poor in those days, as you ken, and Isaac was most industrious." But here Jacob's voice was mute—and he walked out into the open air. Michael joined him there—and by the long conversation that ensued concerning Isaac, the father's heart was quieted, and believed that his son's spirit was now happy in Heaven.

Leaving the family at Ladyside composed and resigned, Michael, Agnes, and Lucy returned beneath the stars to Bracken-Braes. Lucy scarcely opened her lips—for she thought of Isaac's very last words, and knew, now that his heart was still in the dust, how much dearer she had been to it than she had ever believed. His many good qualities well deserved her tears, and the remembrance of the happy hours she had long ago passed with him and his sisters, when every one loved and admired him; but the thought that she had been dearer to him than even his own nearest kin, and that his affection for her was the last thing to leave

his soul on the bed of death, touched her with an almost self-upbraiding sorrow, and gave his memory a hold on her secret bosom, from which she felt nothing could ever displace it.

While they were all sitting round the fire, and just as the clock striking ten told them to retire to rest, the door opened, and in came Mary Morrison. "Pity me," cried Aunt Isobel, "what brings you here sae late at night—tell us, are you all well at Ewebank?" Mary sat down on the seat that Lucy's ready hand had placed for her, and said calmly, "My dear father is dead! Perhaps I should not have left him—but there was nobody in the house with me; and when it became quite dark, for the fire had gone out, I was not able to abide the dreadful stillness, and have come here." The key of the hut was yet in her hand, which she had carried in it, unconsciously, all the way from Ewebank.

Abraham Morrison's death had been sudden; but every circumstance attending his latter days had been such as now to comfort his daughter. Their reconcilement had been perfect; and the last year of the old man's life, blameless and Christian-like, had prepared him for this change. Mary had been already acquainted with grief, and now sat in her cloak, beneath which she still wore her widow's weeds, unagitated by any strong emotion, like one having come from a neighbour's house on some grave, but not grievous errand. She had come, too, at a time when all her friends were, from the me-

lancholy duty in which they had been engaged during the day, in a state of mind altogether congenial with her own; and in another hour Mary was lying, as she had often done before, in Lucy's bosom.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHAT strong support does the consciousness of a good reputation yield to all men in the discharge of their most arduous duties, and how benignly does a regard to the opinions of those among whom we live blend almost into one motive with that which we observe towards the injunctions of our Maker! Michael Forester knew that he was esteemed—beloved by every family in Holylee; and although he had in no one single instance ever tried to become the object of such sentiments, by any unworthy submission or compromise, yet he rejoiced to know their existence, and felt them to be, in part, both the impulse and reward of virtue. Above all, his character as a peace-maker was especially dear to his heart and conscience; and nothing cheered his blindness more than the humble trust, that in administering comfort to human misery, which it had not unfrequently fallen to his lot to do, he had been obeying the precept of Him whose prime commandment was, that we should love one another. Michael had often thought, that had he still possessed his

eye-sight, he might have been more selfish—more exclusively devoted to the temporal interest of his own family, and more lukewarm in the interest of his Heavenly Master. He attributed no merit to himself in any kind action which he had been enabled to perform; but his conscience rewarded him by the most delightful of all feelings—gratitude to God.

There were now two orphans living under his roof, his own brother Abel's Martha and Mary Morrison. Never were any two creatures more different, yet they were equally grateful, and in a month or two after Abraham Morrison's death, it might almost have been said, equally happy. Martha had never known much deep heart-grief, but then she had endured toil, trouble, hardship, and neglect during the worst years of her life, and during the best her happiness had sprung up of itself, whatever it might have been, against not a few depressing circumstances of which the misery had been felt, although overcome. Since she came to Bracken-Braes, no one could be more content and cheerful, showing her enjoyment of life, not by any starts of delight or sallies of glee, but by a perpetual vivacity that kept her stirring from morning to night in solitary occupations, which, whether easy or laborious, seemed alike sources of the liveliest satisfaction. Martha was now quite a Scotch girl, an epithet which she had borne in Ellesmere, without any very good title to what was so respectable; yet still something of the Westmoreland dialect blended with the Doric of the

Selkirk Braes, and at times recalled pleasant remembrances of the distant Vicarage. The first time that Michael stood beside his brother Abel's grave, with Martha by his side, who read the letters on the stone rather with a grave curiosity than any mournful emotion, for what more could they well be to her but mere chiselled characters, his heart travelled back to the garden at Dovenest, and into another world of pleasant years that seemed almost as much apart from that in which he now lived, as two separate states of existence! He thought too of his father's love for Abel, and his conscience told him that he had not forgotten the old man's dying words. Such remembrances might not now, after so many years, be very frequent, but they never recurred without refreshing his whole moral being, and deepening his contentment, his gratitude, and his faith.

Towards Mary Morrison, the feelings of the whole family, if not of a more affectionate, were of a deeper kind. But for them she might have been wholly lost, and the gradual revival of her disconsolate, and once almost broken heart, was a daily delight to them all, but far beyond others, to Lucy. There was nothing approaching to jealousy in Martha's mind towards Mary; on the contrary, that warm-hearted girl always behaved to her with a thoughtful tenderness, which made Lucy love her niece more than she had ever done before, and anxious to show her at all times that there was no preference of Mary Morrison, in any thing that

could wound either pride or affection. Martha was certainly inferior to them both, in fineness and tenderness and depth of character; but still they had no feelings, in which she could not in her own way and measure sympathise, and she sometimes won upon their very closest affection, by unexpected and casual glimpses of sensibilities that her ordinary deportment did not display, but which yet slumbered in her nature, and were fated, at no very distant time, to be called into play, in the more difficult duties of mature life.

As for the Maynes, it is wonderful how happy they all were at Ladyside. Jacob's eldest daughter had been requested in marriage by one of the most respectable young men in the whole parish, the only son of a considerable heritor; and this event, independent of its natural interest to a father's heart, relieved his too anxious and foreboding mind from all the worst fears about his family in case of his own death.

Isaac had cost his father much money—such now were Jacob's own words when speaking of his dead son to his very intimate friends, and without the remotest meaning of censure—so that it was generally supposed that there was a heavy mortgage on the property formerly belonging to Richard Mayne. Such thoughts, very natural, and not at all reprehensible, came to Jacob's mind along with the influence of time and the operation of many other better reflections, till by mid-summer a stranger going in to Ladyside, might have re-

mained there a whole day without seeing or hearing any thing to make him suspect, that a few months ago death had taken away him who had been the pride of the whole house.

It was again midsummer, and no less than two whole years had revolved since Lucy had set out at midnight, under the guidance of Edward Ellis, for Ellesmere. These two years had brought her to woman's estate—and now, in her seventeenth June, perhaps her friends at the Vicarage, were they to see her now, would scarcely know her to be the same maiden that came so suddenly upon them, on that day of rain and thunder, weeping and sobbing on account of her dying mother. These friends had not forgotten her, and the hour had come, when Ruth Colinson and her brother Miles were indeed at Bracken-Braes.

Beautifully prepared for their arrival was the avenue, the green, the garden, and the cottage. Agnes and Lucy remembered the exquisite neatness of every thing in and about the English Vicarage, and almost despaired of equalling what seemed to be peculiar to the character of that country. There was a richness, too, of verdure and bloom at Ellesmere, with which nothing in their own poor pastoral part of Scotland could pretend to vie; and coming from all those woods and groves sounding with their open or hidden waterfalls, what would the Colinsons think of their lone Valley, and the Heriot-Water wimpling along the open pastures? But these thoughts had been only half sin-

cere, and as the sun rose on one of the fairest mornings that the summer had brought, Lucy eyed the place with pride, and was glad that their friends from England were to arrive at Bracken-Braes during such heavenly weather. In the cool of the evening before, all the shrubberies had been watered—a slight sprinkling of bright blue gravel from the burn had given a spirit of liveliness to the avenue and all the plants through which it winded along, and it seemed as if every bee in the Parish were in the Plane-Tree, so loud and yet so lulling was the sound in that umbrageous Tent.

Ruth and her brother had been true to the very hour, and never had there been a happier meeting than now befel in front of that Cottage. Martha was no insignificant personage on this occasion; and for a short time Lucy left all the questions to her, preserving all her own kindest whisperings to Ruth for the shadows of the evening.

This visit awoke in the hearts of Michael and Agnes the most distressing and the most delightful remembrances belonging to their whole life, and while Lucy accompanied Ruth and Miles all about the braes, and not unfrequently to the Hirst, the only old Place worth seeing to strangers, they remained at home conversing about the Vicarage, and the mercy shown to them by their Maker in that crisis. But after the first week Michael also took his staff, and made one of the party on many of their excursions; and on all such walks, Lucy more

and more regarded Miles Colinson with esteem and affection, for then he showed himself forth in converse with her father, and his were talents strong by nature, and nobly endowed by sciences in which there is no deception, and that give a simple and unostentatious character to the whole mind of him by whom they are successfully pursued. How superior seemed to Lucy the calm settled knowledge of such a mind as that of Miles Colinson, to the wild and disturbed eccentricities, which with all his feeling and genius had fatally characterized that of Isaac Mayne! This knowledge was clearly in alliance with virtue. Here, heart and mind were almost different words for the same thing, and Lucy, when Miles was speaking to her father on such subjects as she could understand, did not so much think about his abilities as his dispositions, for a certain considerate sweetness of sentiment embued all he said with the common spirit of humanity. Yet, was Miles Colinson fit to be compared in her imagination with Edward Ellis, the graceful, and elegant, and beautiful boy that had once laid himself down and watched over her while she slept by that mossy well in the desert, with no other living thing near them but the moorland birds, and the bees murmuring through her dreams among the flowers and heather-bells of the solitary mountains? But that was a childish vision, and never again could it find an abiding place within a bosom not yet indeed depressed, but still somewhat hushed by the almost unconscious influence of the sha-

dows of time stealing upon her altered being! The past, while it rose up before her, now always possessed the character of a dream, and like a dream stood apart by itself from the realities of the living world. Such dreams visit every human heart, sometimes perhaps sickening it by the contrast, yet oftener inspiring gratitude, for in all their beauty, what are they but the golden mist that shrouds all objects in undistinguishable delight, and veils from youthful eyes the real shapes and lineaments of nature?

Besides, Lucy's whole mind was now woman-grown, and all the relations of life had been, oftener than she knew, meditated upon by her with their delights and duties. The conversations that took place every evening by the fireside when all were sitting together, were often of a light, but never of a trifling nature. Pure were all Lucy's thoughts as the well in which she dipt her pitcher, but they were familiar with all sacred household words; and as she beheld herself in her mirror which, close to the window of her bed-room reflected not only her face and figure, but all the flowering richness of the avenue, and the beauty of the broomy-braes, she would sometimes slowly retire, and then as slowly return in her rejoicing beauty, like a bride on her wedding-morn; and it may be, wondering in a transient thought, if it were impossible that she could be now beloved by Miles Colinson, as she had once been, by one far away over the roaring seas!

Poor Mary Morrison, the blossoms of whose early af-

fections had been so soon dismally blighted, thought now of nothing else than Lucy and Mr Colinson. Could she see Lucy married to such a man, then would all her own cares be forgotten. ' The sight of such pure, calm, thoughtful and profound affection as was dawning upon her eyes sometimes almost made her weep, for although her conscience had not much to reproach her with in her unhappy love for Mark Thornhill, how different had been his wooing from this! How uncertain, and how troubled,—how deceitful in its sincerest tenderness,—how cruel in its close,—and then what distraction on that bed of death! Theirs were the first gentle beginnings of mutual faith—of love almost before the hearts in which they were arising, knew with what kind of delight it was that they were so sweetly stirred. There were truth—simplicity—honour—and religion, all united in one holy purpose, and yet that purpose scarcely known to those bosoms of which, nevertheless, it shaped and coloured all the very lightest and the very gravest thoughts. " In former days, sometimes when sitting by ourselves on the sunny braes, I have said to Lucy that I would be her bridesmaid—some far happier creature than me must now stand in that place;—but perhaps I may be allowed to go with Lucy Colinson to Ellesmere, and methinks these hands o' mine could better than ony ither but her ain put up her bonny hair, and adorn her like a lily on her wedding-day. No black must be worn on that holy morning of sadness and joy; and I will lay

aside my weeds for one day, returning to them again by the next sun, for they are tokens of my affection for him who is gone, and also of my sin and repentance."

But what did Miles Colinson think of Lucy Forester? He could not forget the hour when first he saw Ruth wringing out the rain from her ringlets, as she stood among them in the Vicarage, beseeching them to say if her mother was indeed alive. But now those ringlets, although they had lost something of that sunny glow which the tempest could not tame with all its deluge, were far more lovely than ever, in the subdued and tender light that shone over her thoughtful forehead. Then she had been accustomed to gaze on every thing she beheld, with the almost instinctive delight of childhood,—but now Lucy understood more of the meanings on the face of nature, and looked over the Heaven and the earth with a spirit of piety that felt God to be there, even while all her thoughts were about her fellow-creatures and their habitations. Even when Lucy spoke of that festival on Windermere, which at the time had seemed to be more like a glorious train of sights passing in the trance of a fairy dream than a scene transacting on the bosom and the banks of a real lake, it was with a calm and almost melancholy voice; for was she ever again to behold those clouds, and woods, and waterfalls, shadowed far down within the depths of that mirror, over whose surface not an air breathed to veil with dim suffusion the reflected scenery of earth and heaven?

"Am I ever again to be at Ellesmere," thought Lucy; and the same thought, more eager, ardent, impassioned, and overwhelming, was in the heart of him to whom Lucy was every hour becoming dearer and more dear, till even the very sense of her surpassing beauty was lost in a love that lived upon her whole delightful character, and could never die away while life lasted, even if that beauty were to be utterly extinguished —for still the maiden at his side would be Lucy Forester, and none but she was ever to be cherished in his heart, whether it had been already doomed that she was thenceforth to be to him but a shadow, or a steady light that might shine on him for ever!

It was not possible that Miles Colinson's growing attachment to Lucy could escape the notice of any one of those most interested in her welfare, and Michael and Agnes, happy as they would both be beyond their imagination of happiness were their daughter to become the wife of such a man, almost wished that he were gone from Bracken-Braes. They did not know whether such a connection,—and yet perhaps the very forethought was altogether but an idle dream,—might be agreeable to the worthy Vicar. The visit had merely been one of a friendly return; and such consequences as now seemed far from improbable could never have entered into the minds of Mr Colinson's parents when he and Ruth left Ellesmere. There almost seemed to the high and independent mind of Michael Forester something clandestine, or at least not perfect-

ly open, in thus allowing the affection of the guest below his roof to grow into a deeply rooted attachment for his own daughter, without being perfectly certain that such an attachment would be approved by those who were not indeed privileged to dispose of their son's feelings, but certainly to guide them, and to be consulted in their final decision. Agnes felt the same difficulty and delicacy in this situation; but Aunt Isobel considered the subject in a very different light. "What's the use, children, o' making yourselves unhappy about what is one day to be the greatest blessing that ever shone upon us frae Heaven, either at Dovenest or Bracken-Braes? My troth, there is nae occasion to pity the folk at the Vicarage. A Grand Vicar Apostolic o' the Episcopalian Church the Young Man's father maun indeed be, if Lucy Forester be not worthy of marrying into his family! For my ain part, I like the lad, God forgie me, very near as well as Mr Ellis himself—and he was a boy o' many thousand—but will any body tell me that he deserves our Lucy? And yet he loves her well—that I can see, dim and auld as are my een noo—and will love her better and better as lang as he lives. For he has a strong thoughtfu' heart, that young Mr Colinson, and gin I am not sore mista'en, a clear conscience; and when such a one loveth a maiden, it is not for her face, or her een, or her breast, although that maiden be our bonny Lucy hersel', but for something that endureth and fadeth not away, the soul within us being immortal."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Thirty long days, certainly in general the finest of all the year in Scotland, from the middle of June to the middle of July, had floated away down the sky since Ruth and Miles Colinson had first found themselves domesticated at Bracken-Braes. Scarcely during all that time had there been a dim forenoon, or any other than golden sunsets. Such weather may be objected to on account of sameness, and deficiency in picturesque and poetical effects; but it gives ample scope of time to hill-wanderers, and their walks of discovery between morn and eve, unimpeded by swollen rivulet or dripping fern, can embrace vale after vale—glen after glen—secret chasm known but to natives—wide moors not without a spirit of lonesome beauty—lochs miles asunder—and the cataract far up among the mountains, the boundary indeed of the journey, and beneath whose overshadowing birches, within reach of the dewy spray, the Pilgrims may find shelter from the mid-day heat, and spread their table in the peaceful wilderness.

But the last evening they were to pass at Bracken-Braes was now about to descend; and although there was no reason for melancholy, a pleasant pensiveness seemed deepening below the shadow of the Plane-Tree. Ruth and Myles had taken farewell of the few families in whose houses they had familiarly sat, especially those at Raeshaw, Ladyside, and the Manse; so there was nothing more to do in the view of their departure. Lucy, Ruth, Mary Morrison, and Martha, walked down the Heriot-Water in that uncertain and unconcerned state of mind as to their movements that every one feels when affected by mingled pleasure and pain. Miles Colinson was glad to see the groupe tripping across the bridge of the Whin-Holms, for he was desirous of being alone for an hour with Michael and Agnes, nor did he care if Aunt Isobel were also to hear his confessions.

There was but little chance of any visitor coming to Bracken-Braes at that hour of the evening; but Miles Colinson thought neither the Parlour nor the Plane sufficiently safe from interruption, so he requested his friends to walk with him a little way up the hill behind the house, in among the hazles, hollies, and yews, where there were several little glades, as perfectly retired, within a hundred yards of the porch, as if they had been in the heart of a forest. In one of these they took their seats on the limb of an old disinterred tree; and while one and all suspected what might be the nature of the commmunication, yet not one of them

would have been surprised, had Miles Colinson introduced quite another subject.

Miles at once declared with earnestness but composure, for he felt too profoundly to be visibly agitated, that he loved Lucy, and hoped that if he were so happy as to gain her affections, her parents would give their consent to the marriage. He acknowledged that as yet he had no reason to believe that her regard for him was at all of the nature of love, and that indeed the idea of her extreme youth had often so influenced his behaviour towards her, that he was aware she could now only think of him as an elder brother. He felt that he owed it to Lucy's simplicity and innocence, to the parental kindness with which he had been received at Bracken-Braes, and to the character and condition of Mr Forester,—for now for the first time in his life he alluded to Michael's blindness,—to the remembrance of all that happened when they were at the Vicarage,—and to his own father and mother,—to confess in this manner the state of his affections, before he even endeavoured to win Lucy's heart. "I dare not now speak to your daughter of love or marriage, Mr Forester; for were Lucy to hear me with averted eyes, methinks I could not bear to live; but all I beseech of you is leave to hope; that if in future months or years Lucy should give me her affections you will not dislike me for a son-in-law."

Both Michael and Agnes, when Miles Colinson had ceased speaking, thought of themselves, and that sweet

spring Sabbath, more than seventeen years ago, when in the gardens of Dovenest they found that a few words had betrothed them, and that a new light, fairer than ever they had beheld before, was stealing over the woods of Dryden. Agnes was now sitting by Michael's side, and laid her hand in sudden happiness upon his, which was not slow to return its pressure. "If I live," said Michael, "to see the day on which you will call Lucy your wife, this world will be almost too happy for her blind father!" The fine and delicate spirit of Agnes had felt unspeakable delight in the reverence with which Mr Colinson had behaved to her husband, and the exquisite tenderness he had shown towards Lucy's youth and innocence. This was indeed love—love such as she had herself enjoyed for so many years—uninterrupted—unimpaired—indestructible in its sanctity and in the preserving spirit of human joy that, but for love would fall—die—and be buried like the flowers of the senseless earth.

Isobel alone stood up, and her eyes shining with a lustre like that of youth looked towards the setting sun. "I see long years of happiness preparing for them by that hand, which is over all His works. Yes, I have seen my Agnes the happiest of the happy—as she is, and ever was, the best of the good—and now, lo! her Maker hath also blessed my Lucy, and her life and her latter end shall be peace."

But now voices were heard below, and Lucy's was among them; and, from the deadened sound, it was

plain the party had sat down beneath the Plane-Tree. Although but few words had been uttered by those assembled in that glade, yet a weight of solemn and sacred meaning had lain upon their language. Miles Colinson, without any pain, was willing to obey the injunctions of Lucy's parents, not to address her till the following summer, having been assured by them that there was no danger of her heart yielding to any other attachment. From their affectionate prayers for his welfare he felt that in his absence they would not only prevent his image from fading altogether away from Lucy's heart, but would hold it always before her in the most favourable and endearing light. In that hopeful state of mind, he begun to dwell upon little circumstances that had occurred between him and Lucy, that seemed now, although they were too indefinite even to be named, to be not wholly insignificant; and indeed had he not been, although aware of his own moral worth and intellectual acquirements, a more than usually modest person respecting any power over the female heart—a power which he had never before thought of very seriously exerting—he might have believed, without any very great mistake, that Lucy's eyes regarded him with a pleasure that although not what could be called love, was something at her tender age far better, from which would in due time be made to spring, "that consummate flower," which can only unfold to perfect beauty in the light of matured reason.

Certainly that evening, although the last, was the happiest that Miles Colinson had past at Bracken-Braes. Lucy, altogether unconscious of being not only the object of all his love, but as it might be said, affianced to him by parents, who feared not but that her affections would soon glide into his bosom, sat with her arm round Ruth's neck, and gave her, over and over again, the kindest messages to her father and mother, independently of a long letter, which she had written something in the form of a journal. Miles had made many pencil sketches of the scenery of Holylee, which Lucy had never before thought so beautiful in reality, much as she loved it all, and he asked her to keep them for his sake. Lucy promised to do so without a blush, but with the most benign eyes, and with Miles leaning over her, arranged, according to her own liking, the small green nooks with a few sheep, or two or three cattle feeding, or standing below a rock—a little broomy oasis in the blackness of a Scottish moor—a waterfall—aye, even the Linn of the Howlet's Nest closed in by gentle braes in its sylvan loneliness from all but the silent sky—a glade in the Hirst woods, selected by Lucy herself, because one of the favourite haunts of Emma Cranstoun. These, and many more, she promised, as she was asked, to keep for his sake; nor did she conceal her joy at the thought of visiting Ellesmere, which Michael said was not impossible next summer, unless indeed the Vicar and Mrs Colinson would come to them at Bracken-Braes. "The

Lady of the Hirst," said Lucy, "will be coming home next summer, for, by the blessing of God, her health is now perfectly restored by the air of those sweet foreign lands—and I must not be away when she returns." But Miles Colinson, from her affectionate looks when she was thus thinking of Ellesmere, drew the most delightful hopes, and said with a smile, "that, for the future, they would all trust in Providence." Lucy had shown some of Emma Cranstoun's letters, first to Ruth and then to her brother, for they contained no secrets that might not be heard by any friend she had; and Miles Colinson could not but be still prouder of his Lucy—for to himself he had sometimes dared to call her so, when the sunshine danced into his heart—on thinking how highly that accomplished Lady estimated her character, and how tenderly she admitted her into her friendship.

Early next morning a parting took place without a tear beneath the Plane-Tree, and as long as Ruth and her brother were visible, many a farewell was wafted to them down the vale, by hand and kerchief—many a prayer sent after them, when they had disappeared.

CHAPTER XL.



The harvest in the parish of Holylee was this season a late one, and there had been much cold and inclement weather during the ripening month, so that well on in October, the crops, especially on the uplands, were still green, and promised badly for the threshing-floor. Since the time Michael Forester came to Bracken-Braes, there had been much more land brought into tillage, along the course of the Heriot-Water, and except now and then in a late and unfavourable season like this, the new agriculture had been far from unproductive. It so happened that there were a greater number of acres under the plough this year than any previous one, and there was even a want of hands for the harvest. What happens in one hill parish, generally happens in a great measure in another, and bands of shearers were now traversing the south of Scotland, some of them even from the most distant Highlands.

A small band, consisting of father, son, and daughter, had looked in at Bracken-Braes, and were hired for a fortnight. At the expiration of that time, they were

to go to Ladyside, and it was probable they might get a few days likewise at Raeshaw. They had not been at Bracken-Braes half-a-week, till Donald Fraser had told the story of his not uneventful life.

Donald had been a soldier, and had seen service on the sands of Egypt, under Abercromby. Although not the Highlander who took the Invincible Standard, he would not have been slow in taking it had it come in his way, and a bayonet in his hand must have been an unchancy weapon. Unfortunately his broad breast and brawny limbs had escaped without a wound, so Donald had no pension. Foreign warfare, and foreign climate had done his constitution some wrong, and to say the truth, except by fits and starts, it did not appear that Donald had ever been very fond of work. On leaving the army, which he had been forced to do by rheumatism that at one time threatened to leave him lame for life, he took up his abode in a hut near the head of the Dee, the most mountainous region perhaps in Scotland. He had left a wife and two children there when he joined the Forty-second, and soon after his return, his wife died, leaving him to provide, as best he could in that solitary region, for Hamish and Flora. Year after year had passed away, and there had never been any absolute want of food or raiment, such as they were, in Donald's hut. The lochs were full of trout, the river of salmon, the heather mountains of grouse, and the forest of deer, and Donald had several fishing-rods and one rifle. Now that

his son and daughter were grown up, they had for several harvests sallied into the Lowlands, sometimes walking and working their way by Montrose and Kirkaldy, and on the last occasion, coming direct from Aberdeen to Edinburgh, by the Brilliant Steam Yacht.

Hamish was about nineteen years of age, of quiet manners and inoffensive disposition, as most Highlanders are when not put out of their way; but bold, active, and patient of hunger, cold, and toil. Beside his father, who was almost of gigantic mould, Hamish seemed little more than a dwarf; but he was in fact rather above the middle size, slim, straight, and muscular, every motion betokening the possession of strength and agility not thrown away on useless pastimes, but reserved for occasions of real need. The courtesy for which his poorest and most uneducated countrymen are so pleasingly distinguished, marked his demeanour in a more than ordinary degree, and when he threw aside his bonnet, his freckled and weather-beaten countenance, without being remarkable for one single feature, except perhaps its light blue and sincere eyes, was extremely agreeable, and when lighted up with a smile, even handsome below its curls of yellow hair. There was not a better hook on the corn-rigg than the young Highlander, for, besides going over much ground in little time, he left the stubble no higher than his ankle. As for food, he cared not about it, nor what it was, if wholesome—barley-meal and goat's milk had still been

the chief fare in the hut by the Linn of Dee, although it must be confessed that a more potent liquor, when it came in the way, was in no disrepute, and that the old man especially, although he knew his besetting sin, was not very cautious against temptation.

Flora Fraser was one of those perfectly simple and harmless—say at once, innocent creatures—of whom it is thought we may read in old songs and ballads, the fictions of imaginative minds in lowly life, but no where existing even in the hut farthest remote from the haunts of men. But in those little traditionary strains of feeling, and of genius, the human spirit speaks of itself no more than the truth; and although to those who live not among the lonely dwellers in the wild, and know them most imperfectly from the mere appearances of their outward condition, such pictures may seem false and visionary, yet the colours are true as those of twilight or the sunset heavens, and touched by an unerring hand obeying the genuine impulses of nature. Flora had slept all her life on heather or straw—and little or no care had ever been taken to keep her mind from the knowledge of those evils, and vices, and sins, that, like the seeds of plants, seemed to be wafted by the winds into the most secluded and solitary places, and sometimes grow there with a rank luxuriance, even below the same atmosphere that cherishes all the best charities of life. Although her father protected his daughter's virtue, and would have killed the man who offered to corrupt it, yet the rough old soldier had of

course little delicacy of thinking, or of speaking, and had not only witnessed, but taken a part in many a scene of turbulent and reckless enjoyment in those bloody but triumphant companies. But still, like some beautiful small bird of the mountains, that rises up with unstained and shining plumage, from the dankest marsh, and in the midst of the raining mists, young Flora Fraser had retained all the hues of her native innocence, and returned home from her walks or occupations among the mountains, happy as that bird to its nest. And now cheerful in the haughs or on the uplands of Holylee, as in the glens that open down to her own river, she sung her old Gaelic songs around Bracken-Braes, or sat sheltered in her tartan plaid, when the sleet came strong, below the hills that wanted the heather on which, from infancy, she had watched her few sheep and goats at the foot of the great Highland mountains.

Martha, who, for the last years of her childhood, had always been a worker in the open air, was not contented to remain at home in domestic occupations, and now joined the shearers. She and Hamish Fraser were together on the same corn-rigg; and, busy as they all were, still there was time for talk even during their work; and then, at meals taken in the field by the hedge-side, on some bank below a tree—all was glee and merriment with every group. Hamish and Martha were at first fellow-shearers, then acquaintances, and then friends; and, before the fortnight was over

and all the fields covered with stooks, or some of them left naked by the wains rapidly moving to and fro from the stack-yard, they were more to each other than friends, even lovers in all the warmth and tenderness of youthful affection. The Frasers always, after the days work, walked down to the village to their beds, in a small apartment there; and it did not require much persuasion to induce Martha occasionally to accompany them, while old Donald led the way with his bag-pipe, that sounded with a wild outlandish music among the braes—laments and marches, melancholy or exulting, as over chiefs that had fallen, or with kilted battalions rushing to battle. Love was made both in shade and sunshine, without those young creatures knowing that it was love; and, on the evening before the Highland party were to move to Ladyside, Martha promised to marry Hamish Fraser, and to go with him, if he chose, to the world's end.

Donald blamed in no measured terms his son's folly, and tried to frighten the young lovers by terrific pictures of the married life; but he had himself done the same thing in his youth; and when he saw that a marriage it would be, he gave Martha his blessing. Flora, too, cheerfully called her sister, for Martha was too passionately attached to Hamish not to give her affection freely to one so near a-kin to him. Lucy Forester was not held the less dear—nor did she become forgetful or ungrateful to her uncle and aunt; yet still from Bracken-Braes she was willing to go, and fearlessly, and

without an hour's hesitation, to enter into the uncertain prospects of a new life.

Not a little surprise was given to them all, at Michael's fireside, by this unexpected event; but what had happened was not to be changed. There was something to regret, but not to blame; and, since Martha would go, it was now their duty to be as kind to her, on her departure, as they had been during her stay, and, in as far as lay in their power, to contribute to the comfort and respectability of her condition. Nature, where there is no guilt, may as well be allowed to take its course, even when prudence would say nay. Perhaps there was some wilfulness in Martha's disposition which could only fruitlessly have been opposed, and if thwarted, would have affected not only her future happiness, but her very nature; and, judging considerately and affectionately what was, on the whole, best for her condition and circumstances, Michael and Agnes used few arguments to dissuade her from her resolves; and then made a promise, which they faithfully kept, to treat her the same as ever while she stayed at Bracken-Braes, and to send her, not only with their best prayer and advice, but with substantial comforts, into the wide world.

CHAPTER XLI.

The three merry harvest-homes, at Raeshaw, Lady-side, and Bracken-Braes were not over till the first week in December. Many of the latest waggons left the marks of their wheels on the snow, and some patches of grain that never ripened at all fed the working-horses in the field or stable. The large kitchens of these houses exhibited, each on its own night, a feast that was not long of melting away before many well-earned appetites—there was no distinction of rank between master and servant, heritor or hind, at these plenteous boards—nor was there any need of crabbed censor to restrain the harmless wit, that ever and anon set the table in a titter, or a roar. Soon as the few toasts had been given, at the head of which, even before his well-beloved Majesty, Great George the King, came not with loud cheers, but low murmuring congratulations, "The Lady of the Hirst," tables, chairs, and forms were expeditiously removed, and the floor cleared for the dance, reel, or jig—for waltz, or cotillon, were yet unknown, while Bauldy Baird, successor

to Blind Sandy Paisley, now under the mouls, screwed his strings to the sticking-place, and after a few prelusive flourishes, broke, with all his birr, into the Cameronian rant, or Lord Macdonald's reel. Martha and the young Highlander were conspicuous for the right good will with which they tripped it and flung it to the gay strathspeys. Lucy did not decline the awkward bow, and the bony hand of the homeliest suitor, and even Mary Morrison herself was once or twice on the floor, although she preferred sitting with Agnes and Isobel, or making herself useful among the refreshments. Old Donald had still in the room his unmerciful bagpipe, and among the "sma' hours," without asking leave of any one, blew up his chanter, and to the angry dismay of Bauldy Baird, whose fiddle was then no more heard than if it had been a mouse "cheepin' in the riggin'," filled the house with a din, that made many a pretty girl put her hands to her ears, and no doubt sorely disturbed the bonny grey cock, and his wives and family, in his adjoining roost beyond the hallan.

Now that all these festivities were over, and winter had fairly set in, who to make amends for his absence the year before, brought with him his most boisterous train of storms and snows, the Highlanders spoke of taking their departure—not for their hut at the Linn of Dee, for that they had left for ever and a day, but for distant Canada. Donald Fraser had for many years been impatient of his poor and uncertain, and

often inactive life, and had resolved to emigrate. He knew that he had a brother in Canada, although he had not for a long time heard directly from himself, and that he was also in a prosperous condition. Many of his countrymen, and not a few of his clan were settled there, and the old soldier, who had been in all climates, cared not if he should leave his bones in a foreign soil, since it was tilled by Highland hands. Hamish and Flora were willing to go with their father, and they were buoyed up by the adventurous spirit of youth, that looked with an imaginative eye into a life beyond the seas. It was not to be thought that Martha would be the one of the party most prone to regret or fear; she had been contented in Ellesmere, happy at Bracken-Braes, and she now hoped to be even more than happy in the Canadian woods.

Michael Forester could not, however, agree to their plan of embarking at Greenock in a vessel just then about to sail, and insisted on their waiting till the winter hurricanes were over, and taking advantage of the more moderate breezes of early spring. With some difficulty the stubborn veteran was prevailed on to remain in the neighbourhood for a few months; and Ewebank, which, since Abraham Morrison's death, had been untenanted, was soon put into a habitable state. Donald and his son took immediate possession—Michael sent over one of his best milch-cows, and an old oak chest, by way of girnel, well filled in its two departments with oat and barley meal. Isobel added a few

of her celebrated mutton-hams; and old Donald himself, who, if there was a still within six miles, scented it out with miraculous sagacity, procured by some inexplicable means, a tolerable sized cask of mountain-dew, in which he endeavoured to assure his sceptical friend Mr Forester that there was not a single headache.

Both the veteran and his son got plenty of winter work to do, and earned good wages. Martha was still an inmate of Bracken-Braes, but there were few days on which she did not see her lover. It was fixed that the wedding was to take place on her birth day, in the middle of February, when she would have completed her seventeenth year—and they were to take their passage in the first Greenock ship that was to sail for Canada in March.

Meanwhile every hand was busy within Bracken-Braes getting ready clothes and comforts of all kinds for the voyage and their Canadian dwelling. Martha had never seemed to care much about dress before, although her Westmoreland education had taught her at all times to be neat and tidy about the house as a swallow—but now she half imitated the way in which Lucy put up her hair, and half-adorned her ringlets by more careful and assiduous touches of her own taste. In compliment to Hamish, or rather in undesigning sympathy, she sent all the way to Edinburgh for a plaid of the Fraser tartan; and whether it was that her features and complexion suited the colours of the web, or that

her face was now tinged and animated by the glow of youthful passion, Martha certainly never had looked half so well before, and might even be said to have some pretensions to beauty. But Martha had no pretensions to any thing she did not possess; and any little alteration that now took place, either in her appearance, her manners, or her general conduct, proceeded entirely from that blameless joy that rose within her heart at the thought or the sight of Hamish Fraser, and that so far from engrossing her wholly, prompted her to even more than her usual obligingness and gratitude to every body around her, from all her relations at Bracken-Braes to Alexander Ainslie at Holylee, who had driven them years ago down from Ellesmere. Seeing her cheerfulness, her industry, her activity, her intelligence, and her amiable disposition, now shown in a stronger and more trying light than ever, the whole family felt that they were going to lose a most excellent member, but at the same time one who was admirably adapted for the life she had chosen, and who would be happy, and make any kind husband happy, in any corner of the world.

The middle of February was not long of arriving; and the young Highlander issued out from the Manse after Mr Kennedy had made them one, with Martha on his arm, amidst a loud shout of congratulation sent up from all the village-school children, and others of a larger growth. Alexander Ainslie, whom nature had destined for one of the Tenth Hussars, took the lead and kept it in the broose, on an iron-grey galloway

whose fame is yet rife in the parish of Holylee. Donald led the foot procession across the hills, with cheeks before which the peony would have waxed pale, the drones of his pipe flowing with a hundred ribbons; and the day being calm, it is asserted that the concluding pibroch was heard in the kirk-yard all the way from Ewebank, although that solitary farm-house was three good Scottish miles from Holylee; and the length of any one of these may be judged of by all who have performed the distance at the close of a day's walk, when the way-side inn has seemed to retire into the mists, and the termination of a Scottish mile to be extended to a remoteness fearful to the very imagination.

About a fortnight after the wedding, a letter came from Donald's agent, a tide-waiter in Greenock, marked "haste and care,"—an injunction to which no doubt all due attention was paid by more than one post-master,—urging him to appear forthwith on the quay, for that the good ship Montreal was nearly ready for sea.

Before the marriage, Michael Forester had given Martha fifty pounds in money, and paid all their passages to Quebec. Stores had been also purchased for them in Greenock, and Martha's wardrobe was little inferior in the number of articles, and far superior in solid worth to that of many a young lady sailing to the Orient for a husband. Donald, Hamish, and Flora had each a privy purse—what sums they held did not appear, but they could not have been very magnificent, saved as they had been from the wages of their Lowland har-

vests. A certain sum was to be sent to them annually, after it was known where they had ultimately settled, so that the emigrants were to be independent of Donald's brother, who might be dead, or if alive, unwilling to acknowledge the claims of kindred. There was, in good truth, nothing to send them away to Canada, but the hearts of one and all yearned for a foreign land; their cool determination had become longing desire; and even Martha was impatient to hear the rustling of the great ship's sails, so different from those that she had seen gliding along the blue water of Windermere—and that were to waft her away from the hollow skies which lately had seemed to her to encircle the whole world.

The Emigrants came to take farewell, most probably for ever, of their friends at Bracken-Braes. Martha sat by the side of her youthful husband, and was waited upon by Lucy, who, with tears in her eyes, handed round wine and cake on the little silver tray she had got in a present from Emma Cranstoun. Mary Morrison could not help looking at the young bride almost with pity for her sake, and with a mournful remembrance of her own sad story; but Aunt Isobel would not allow even a parting scene to be clouded with vain grief. "God bless you baith, my gude bairns—nae fear you will be happy.—Hear how the very bird in his cage there sings to you—the first time he has tuned his pipes this spring, and is na it a cheerfu' sang?—A' the world over, nae better omens are de-

sired than the lilt o' birds; and, in Scotland, the maist encouraging is that o' the lintwhite and the mavis." Agnes put a small Bible into Martha's hand, and asked back her own as a memorial. Michael put his hand on her head, and, remembering his brother Abel, gave her a silent blessing—and then sweet Flora Fraser came in for her share of the tender farewell, when the Emigrants at last rose to go. Lucy and Mary Morrison were not in the room, but they had gone to wait for them a little way down the burn, and they did not return home till more than an hour after their final departure.

CHAPTER XLII.

Once more had the sunny June loaded the woods of the Hirst with beauty, and darkened into grateful twilight a thousand glades that, but a month ago, were all open to the sky. The grey walls of the ancient Edifice could now be espied but from a few distant points, for oak, elm, and sycamore were hiding all its turrets. For two dull years, the majestic and venerable place had lost the animating and presiding spirit, that breathed a cheerfulness throughout all its scenery. Although skilful hands had continued to do every thing required by the perfect order and regularity of the walks, lawns, and gardens, that furnished a delightful contrast to the rich confusion of nature over the adjacent groves and remoter woods, yet, during the absence of the Lady, many fine and delicate perceptions had been wanting, which had formerly discovered, almost every day, some new embellishment or some magic change, perhaps no more than the lopping off a bough, or the thinning of a coppice-skreen, that in a moment brought the airy distance to view,—or a cot-

tage embowered in trees, or a bright slope of hill-side, or a wider expanse of sky, for the clouds to travel in or to repose. But now the Hirst was to be jocund as in its best days, for the wide gates of the avenue were flung open, and, under an arch, a triumphal arch of flowers and blossoms, was the Lady expected to pass to her native home, returning from blessed Italy in perfect health, and, as the rumour flew, if possible more beautiful than ever.

A few days before, there had been a meeting of some of the most intelligent of the tenantry, and they had arranged with the land-steward their plan of welcome. Ten thousand branches would never be missed in those extensive and gigantic woods—the removal of ten thousand flowery sprays would scarcely dim the lustre of that wilderness of lilacs and laburnums—the bees would know no difference among the banks of wall-flowers, although troops of children were to carry away in little baskets on their heads, all that their hands in one forenoon could gather of those balmiest treasures of our Scottish Flora—and if the earliest roses must go, although yet but in the bud, let them be plucked without a sigh, and trust to the prodigal summer to bring undiminished brightness to every parterre and terrace. But they all knew that the Lady had been fond of roaming among the braes, and that she admired nothing more than the spreading fern, and the broom that yellowed the little lonely glens. Many a pretty plant, and flower, and weed, grows almost in every solitary

nook, and places familiar only to the birds, bees, and sheep, were now rifled of their sweetness, that the triumphal arch might show to her gaze some of the native products of the hills, intermingling their simple charms with the richness of the lawn and garden. It was not till a little after sunrise, on the very morning the Lady was expected to arrive, that the last touches were given to the arch by Lucy's own hands, and so many perfectly fresh and unfading flowers were clustering there, that the wandering bees wheeled from their forward flight to the clover-lea, and lingered in the honey-dew of those gorgeous garlands.

Such was the spirit of the Festival; for among those lowly folks, Love looked to Imagination to brighten the Lady's birth-place to her eyes on her return from a foreign land. That triumphal arch was nothing less than most beautiful, with its shower of blossoms now moving in the breeze, and now when the air was calm, depending stedfastly as images in water. But the bugle rang from the top of the central turret of the Hall, a signal of the happy Approach, and up came a splendid equipage sweeping along, while the tall white ostrich feathers gracefully nodding in the airy sunshine, told all the joyful assemblage that the Lady of the Hirst was there. There was no shout, nor yet was there any music to sound a welcome. But all the tenantry stood with uncovered and bowed heads in salutation, not with downcast looks, as on the day she left them, but with smiles of rejoicing, and not a few tears,

amidst a deepening murmur of blessings. On both sides of the entrance, immediately below the arch that shed flowers down upon their bosoms, stood a row of pretty children all dressed in white, who dropt courtesies, with eyes fixed in admiration of their Lady's angelic beauty—as she stood up in the carriage, and, perhaps little able to speak, waved blessings over all the crowd, with arms that, in their graceful motion, were fairer than the snow. A little apart from the main assemblage, in hopes of attracting the Lady's eyes, stood the party from Bracken-Braes, and Lucy's heart quaked with joy, when that hand waved a kiss towards her, and a smile followed it, of such piercing sweetness as placed her at once in heaven.

This was no idle pageant, that passes away, and leaves the heart half-despising the emptiness of a fantastic dream. But here gratitude gave visible and vivid expression to itself, for its own and its object's delight, in the greenness of bough and the brightness of blossom, which might, without any regret, all fade and wither in the next week's sun, since the feeling they symbolled was imperishable. The very children felt the whole meaning of the spectacle, of which themselves made a proud part; and the wonderful show of flowers was understood by them, as it indeed was, to be an offering to Heaven, although they had never heard of such altars—of thanksgiving for that beautiful Being's escape from the grave. The Sabbath before, Mr Kennedy had alluded to her in his prayer; and that recol-

lection now gave within every innocent heart over which it came a religious sanctity to the rural festival.

Nor was the assemblage suffered to depart and dissolve, till the Lady of the Hirst had an opportunity of more fully expressing her sense of the kindness shown, than she had been able to do in the sudden surprise of that delightful reception. A message was sent to Mr Forester, who was present, in perfect happiness, amidst the beauty of a scene which from Lucy's words he had been at no loss to imagine, that she would be happy to see all her friends, young and old, on the southern lawn. There they were soon arranged in an order that could not be otherwise than proper, since all fell into the places that were felt to belong to their own age, character, or condition. The door of the Green-House opened, and down came the Lady, with light steps, and across the carpet-sod, close to the first row of her humble friends. With the sweetest smiles that ever were seen, she first of all said, that she hoped happiness had been in their homes; and then, with a more solemn expression of eyes, returned thanks to God in their presence for his great mercy to herself. —"But where is Lucy Forester?" These few words, said with a silvery tone, brought Lucy from her father's side, and as she stood there, with eyes downcast, and cheeks pale in emotion, many thought that it was hard to tell which was the most beautiful—Emma Cranstoun or Lucy Forester. All, too, remembered that she had attended the Lady in her illness, and had

been instrumental in saving her very life. Was it not also well known that Lucy had been the friend of all, whenever she had been questioned about their firesides, and that, from her representation, their benefactress had learned all her true knowledge of the family at Bracken-Braes. Therefore, not one heart there felt the slightest touch of envy on seeing Lucy thus singled out—while Michael, who had heard the words with sightless eyes towards Heaven, was perhaps the happiest man there; and the gentle Agnes cared not if the whole assembly noticed her gushing tears. Emma Cranstoun kissed Lucy's cheek, and whispered a few words into her ear; and then, knowing her own station, and finely understanding how far the Lady's condescension was at this time meant to extend, Michael's daughter, after a low obeisance, returned to his side, and the whole group expressed their pleasure and applause.

This had not been intended for one of those more ordinary common-place merry meetings, where tables are placed beneath the shade, and the jovial tenantry of some great estate feast in honour of the House. Such festivals have their own peculiar character of happiness, and may they never be blotted out from the holidays. But here the meaning of the entire day was higher and more solemn;—little parties were formed by the children and their parents, up and down the woods, at some considerable distance from the Hall, which was now left altogether undisturbed;—other

groups took their frugal refreshments by the spring-wells among the braes, plucking the water-cresses to their bread;—and in not a few of the houses on the estate there were evening meetings of youths and maidens, who were all dressed already in their best array, and saw each other home among the falling dews, and below the moon and stars.

CHAPTER XLIII.



LUCY had never, in former years, contemplated the beauty of Emma Cranstoun without melancholy; but now there was no occasion for any such feeling; for her step, although light as ever, was now far more elastic. Nothing like lassitude or decay belonged to her most graceful of all figures. Her voice was mellow as her own new-strung lute; and the joyfulness of grateful health tinged her face, without being able to overcome its characteristic pensiveness. She never could—never ought—never wished to forget, that from the very brink of death she had been restored; and that remembrance, present with her in her pleasantest hours, could not but give to her eyes a perpetual expression of piety, that threw an affecting light over all her ordinary pursuits. It might well have been said that her manners were religious, for they were all inspired by a spirit that was so indeed; and while Emma Cranstoun seldom or never introduced into her common conversation any of that language which, being divine, ought cautiously to be guarded against any in-

voluntary profanation, her pious heart spoke in the entire structure of her speech. She said, that she liked even to hear Lucy's Doric tongue; but what could be her pleasure, in all its simple or Scottish phrases, sweetly syllabled as they were, to the delight which Lucy enjoyed from that perfectly beautiful English that flowed from the Lady's lips, expressive at once of all the highest endowments of mind and soul, and of a range both of thought and feeling to which the humble shepherdess of Bracken-Braes feared even to raise her imagination.

Lucy felt now, even more than ever, the vast distance at which she stood from the Lady of the Hirst. But here was still the same affection, not at all altered in its nature, only deepened and strengthened by a clearer insight into the order of things. When a child —at least a mere girl—she had often sat in the Lady's presence, never, never indeed, with any thing like the feeling of an equal, but almost without any restraint, and free of her own accord to talk or to smile. But now Lucy saw the nice duties of look and manner which that gracious and benign friendship imposed,—duties that no one else could have discerned. There is nothing to hinder love from existing between persons in most unequal conditions, when each knows well the full nature of her own; and perhaps in some peculiarly felicitous instances, that very inequality preserves the completeness of the emotion, and continues it to the end pure, unfading, and entire. It was so with Emma

Cranstoun and Lucy Forester. Here it might be said met together the genii of the hall and the hut—and who could pronounce which spirit was most beautiful, the lady with her dark hair braided across her pensive forehead, and a few pearls among the lace-veil that shaped her head-dress into that which charms in old pictures of our Mary Queen, or the shepherdess with her golden tresses yet as rich in ringlets as when Isaac Mayne compared it to a star twinkling on the brow of the hill, with rays seemingly half light and half dew, so bright, and yet so soft, the splendour?

"What a heart must be hers," thought Lucy, "never to have forgotten one single event or incident, however small, that we ever talked about, never to have lost the least part of her interest in any of the concerns of any one poor family in the whole parish, after an absence of two years, and these years, too, past in struggling with disease in far-away countries! What a memory have the truly good." All this was true, and no exaggeration of Lucy's admiring heart. Indeed the Lady of the Hirst was more attached to it than ever, and now that her health allowed her to rise with the sun, what blessings was it in her power to bestow during the length of a midsummer day! At Bracken-Braes all that was needed was her presence. "An hour in the week on an average all the year through will content me," said the blind man, "a visit from her makes that day a Sabbath, Agnes—does it not?" And Agnes felt the very same state of mind her husband

had thus expressed. Aunt Isobel, it seems, had once seen the Lady's mother on the steps of Dalkeith-House when she was a bride—but she was forced to confess that the living Emma Cranstoun was the fairer, one of the few instances on record of a daughter being more beautiful than her mother. Mary Morrison, now almost cheerful in her widowhood, yet meek as when that word was in childhood first applied by general consent to her name, desired no better happiness than to behold Lucy sitting in the Lady's smiles; but if not a better, yet a more animating happiness was hers, when she herself too came in for her own share of kindness, retired as she most frequently was on some seat in a nook, or a little out of the circle, not to shun observation, for she had lived once more to love the sunshine, but from a humble habit learned in other days, and proceeding from a part of her very nature.

"Lucy—have you heard that my brother is coming to the Hirst? I fear that his long detention in France has not been for the benefit of his character, but I shall hope the best. You know that I had not seen Harry since I was almost a child—but last winter he came to see me at Rome. He is, alas! too much a foreigner—but he treated me with the greatest affection. I do not think that he will ever live at the Hirst—and he has told me that I may live here, if I choose, all my life." No words could be more happy to Lucy, for her heart did not expect, and scarcely wished ever to care much for any thing out of the Parish of Holylee.

But Emma Cranstoun had another communication to confide to Lucy, and she was now led to do so from its connection with what she had said about her brother. "I am engaged, Lucy, to be married—but he who hopes to be my husband loves dearly the Parish of Holylee, and we shall reside at the Hirst, if my brother prefers living abroad—if he possesses the Hall of his forefathers, which I wish he may do, then Mr Ellis intends to purchase the Mains, and build a mansion there, on the site of the present ruin."

"Mr Ellis!" that word almost stopped the beatings of Lucy's heart, although at first it made it flutter nearly into a fainting-fit. But Emma Cranstoun was herself too much possessed by her own thoughts to observe her emotion. "Edward told me that he had frequently visited the family at Bracken-Braes, and indeed, when I think of your moonlight journey, I could almost be jealous,"—and Emma lifted her beautiful white arm to adjust a ringlet that she then felt upon her blushing cheek, with a smile that showed at once ignorance of poor Lucy's first love, and confidence in the power of her beauty. "I am sure, Lucy, you will admire my Edward—he, I know, will love every one I love—and there is not, and never will be that friend dearer to my heart than Lucy Forester."

Lucy soon recovered her composure—and, indeed, what had there been said to agitate her—for had not Edward Ellis been long ago thought of with unpainful affection, and of late, often removed out of her remem-

brance! And then, had not her own heart found more pleasure—more happiness—more delight, than perhaps she might be willing to confess even to herself, in the company of Miles Colinson? Could she have laid her hand on that fair bosom, and denied that it had ever heaved a tender sigh when dreaming of Ellesmere? Was a dream of the days of old, once bright and beautiful as it was, and tender, most tender in all its celestial bliss, to come back from the mist to drive away the pleasant prospects which were dawning around her life, or to deaden her spirit to the enjoyment of more sober realities? Lucy had too simple, too strong, too wise a heart, long to indulge in such delusions; and after a pause of not very many minutes, she kissed the Lady's hand—an expression of attachment which she especially loved, because felt to be at once respectful and endearing—and after prayers for her happiness with Mr Ellis, as sincere as ever went to Heaven, she returned perfectly happy—by the Gowan-Green, and the Hawk-Stane Spring to Bracken-Braes.

CHAPTER XLIV.

When Michael Forester compared all the circumstances of his life from his earliest remembrances, with all that he knew of the lot of any other individual, high or low, rich or poor, and such comparisons had of late years been more and more frequently made by him in his solitary meditations, or in cheerful conversations with his beloved Agnes when all the household were asleep, what reason had he to be grateful to Providence for so many undeserved blessings! Even their unceasing solicitude about Lucy had been to them both a source of happiness, for in all their anxieties, they felt that she was nevertheless secure, and that their fears proceeded entirely from an excess of parental affection. Her beauty, and her goodness were to them one idea; and when praying together, they felt assured that both were indestructible. Then, how had all their worldly affairs prospered! Rich they were not, nor wished to be; bad seasons, and fluctuating prices, had affected them as well as their neighbours, and for a good many years they had had struggles to preserve

their independence. But the farm of Bracken-Braes had seemed to become more productive after Michael's blindness, not merely from its increased cultivation, but even as if the sunshine and the dews had visited it more genially since that affliction. All the money that Michael had at first to borrow had been repaid—Aunt Isobel's three hundred pounds had again been put into the bank in her own name, for old as she was, it was yet possible that she might survive them all —the stock on the farm was his own, and the furniture in the house, and he had considerable sums lent on unexceptionable securities. Were Lucy ever to be left an orphan, she would be very far from destitute; and, perhaps, that confidence is the most perfectly soothing and satisfactory feeling that can fill the bosoms of affectionate and thoughtful parents. What more could they desire on this side the grave?

Now, that Lucy was grown to woman's estate, they sometimes had spoken to her of such matters, and although at first she listened with a painful feeling, for the very possibility which these conversations implied of her parents' death was most distressing, yet since they were so deeply interested in what they said, she did not interrupt them, and even put on an appearance of being interested herself, which was altogether foreign to her real state of mind. As long as her father and her mother lived, Lucy cared not either about riches or poverty—were they to die, she felt that nothing could ever lighten to her eyes the darkened earth. But

they were both well, strong, and happy; neither were they old; and as for her mother, Lucy thought her, nor was she greatly deceived, except the Lady of the Hirst the most beautiful person she had ever seen:—But Emma Cranstoun was not yet twenty, and Agnes Hay nearly twice that age. Her matronly loveliness was yet admired by all, but they who remembered her when first she came into the Parish of Holylee doubted if at that time she could not have stood a comparison even with the Lady, now in the perfection of her virgin beauty.

They were all sitting together under the Plane-Tree, and Lucy cheering the evening silence with a song, when a stranger, who had stood unobserved at a small distance during the time she was singing, advanced courteously, and introduced himself as Mr Maxwell. The name was one that had long since ceased to be familiar to Michael's mind; but Agnes at once recognized a likeness in his features to those of the gentleman whom she had seen at Dovenest, that evening her husband told her of the ruin of his fortunes. "I am the only son, Mr Forester, of Mr Maxwell who came into possession of your property between Lasswade and Roslin." These words awoke many remembrances in Michael's mind, but they were of no painful nature, for he had never repined from the first day he had left Dovenest, and had long been so perfectly reconciled to his lot, that he often felt the pleasure of living over again his life in those quiet gardens washed by the

Esk that mumured louder than the Heriot-Water in his dreams. "It is getting late in the evening, Sir, will you be our guest till the morning?" Mr Maxwell assented, and they all went together into the house.

It was not till after supper and prayers that their guest spoke of any but ordinary subjects; but just as Lucy was lighting his taper, he asked leave to address them on an affair of some importance, and which he hoped would tend in some measure even to promote their domestic happiness, although he saw, and indeed previously knew, that it was built on a surer foundation than mere temporal prosperity. "My father, Mr Forester, was an honest and upright man, and I should be unworthy of calling myself his son, did I not respect his memory. But by his successful industry I am now a rich man, and I am come to restore to you the full value of that property which, on an unfortunate occasion, passed from your into his hands. I do not say that I am unentitled to it, although my doubts are strong; but be that as it may, it is now yours, and had the place itself not long ago been purchased and repurchased, as you know, Dovenest itself should now have been put into your possession. Before I leave this roof, my words shall be made good."

Michael Forester continued to sit exactly in the same posture in which he was before Mr Maxwell began to speak, nor did any visible emotion pass over his placid countenance. Agnes looked at her husband, but her face was equally calm. Aunt Isobel alone spoke,

"Aye—there is an honest man—something more than honest—your very face, my friend, declares your character, and my heart warmed towards you when you knelt beside me on our earthen floor. Your substance will not be lessened by this act—but for it and others like it, for good deeds like bad never go single, Providence will bless your children's children." Mr Maxwell seemed to feel that his conduct scarcely deserved such benediction; but as his conscience told him that he was doing right, his heart did not wholly decline the old lady's commendations, and he had seldom been happier than he now was at that fireside.

Michael, in a few minutes, showed that very strong feelings were rising within his breast. The mere recovery of what had been lost so long ago did not affect him at all, but the principle of Mr Maxwell's conduct did so exceedingly, and there also came over him a deep sense of the goodness of his Maker. How had all things wrought together for the good of himself and family! His father had died quite happy at last, and full of years—poor Abel, after much suffering no doubt which his errors incurred, had found, when all his wanderings were over, a hopeful death-bed, and a quiet grave—Martha the orphan, although far away, had prospects of happiness in that peaceful foreign land —who was so good, and so happy, as his beautiful Lucy —Agnes Hay had brought blessings into his house which none enjoyed more than that gentle spirit—in extreme age, Aunt Isobel was cheerful as a new-stirred

fire—and Mary Morrison, in her meekness, was like a child of their own at Bracken-Braes.

For an hour after all the others had retired to rest, Michael sat by himself in his chair, aware from the cessation of the flickering sound, that the fire was dead on the hearth. It was pleasant to be alone in the perfect silence. His whole soul was calm and bright as the heavens stretched with their stars over all the quiet hills.

What stronger proof of the superior excellence and happiness of virtue than that placid and serene contentment that is almost always the portion of the blind! That inner world which is to us all the most essential world which we inhabit, is to them more clearly discovered than to ourselves. Our inward eye is dazzled with the light in which we live; but theirs, in its darkness, sees well and undisturbedly. Their mind is a clearer world to them, as it is also more clearly revealed. Hence it is, that judging more justly of the human soul, they are less troubled with its passions. Cut off from so many of the amusements and pursuits of human life, and left so much to the dominion of their own silent spirits, they feel and know that there is no stability —no hope—no trust in vicious appetencies or degrading thoughts. All these they fear and abhor as false friends stealing upon the noiseless calm of their lives, and whose visit must bring and leave behind trouble and remorse. But kind affections—pure sentiments—lofty thoughts —gentle opinions of humanity—and devout feelings to-

wards God—these are a solace and support in which there can be nothing vain or delusive. Resignation is ever attended with its own perfect peace; and the blind sitting in their solitude, and for a while forgotten perhaps even by those who most tenderly love them, are happy, because their souls are true to virtue, and because the Great Being who inflicted the dispensation has more than compensated it, by that inward light which shines amidst the thickest darkness with its own sacred and inextinguishable lustre.

CHAPTER XLV.

The Hirst had for several weeks been a scene of unusual festivities; for Henry Cranstoun with several fashionable friends had arrived there from London, and it soon appeared that his tastes and enjoyments were altogether of a different description from those of his incomparable sister. Mr Cranstoun had not been in Scotland since his childhood—for he had received his education at a great English school, and one of the English Universities, and had afterwards been detained for many of the best and most critical years of his life at Verdun. That system of education which has formed so many good and great men, had to him been productive of nothing but evil. His fine talents had either lain wilfully neglected, or grossly misapplied, his passions had run riot in early indulgence, and before he left England he had formed wild, irregular, and disorderly habits, which his long residence in France had confirmed. It was not possible now either to himself or others to understand what was his natural character, it was so overlaid with foreign accomplishments, follies, and

vices. His, however, had seemed to be the very worst kind of selfishness—that which enjoys nothing intensely, unless there be about it something vicious or unlawful; and with all that cheerful laughter and airy demeanour that to heedless observation betokened only good humour and generosity, Henry Cranstoun had always an eye to his own gratifications, and would greedily grasp them to the sacrifice of every just and humane principle. But then he was in the prime of life—extremely handsome—skilled in almost every art of insinuation and allurement—master of all the modern languages of Europe—a consummate musician, for music was an art he might be said to have inherited—of an old family, and with a princely fortune.

It is surprising what a quick and true perception of the moral character of their superiors is often possessed by people in the lowliest conditions. They may make great mistakes, as to manners, acquirements, and intellectual capacity; but, with regard to the essentials of worth, their opinions are generally right. Virtue breathes without disguise—speaks openly—and appears forth clearly before men, even in the most retiring of unostentatious characters. Its lustre cannot be hidden. If it shine not like a star, it will glimmer like a lighted window. Intellect often works in a sphere of which common men know nothing, not even its existence, and the famous genius may seem to them a recluse, ignorant of the world and all its concerns. But if there be great vices in a man's character, let his

rank or riches be what they may, they will be reprobated by the honest poor in their huts. Outward respect may still be shown, for that is due to their station, and the peasant, shepherd, or hind, may, without reproach of conscience, unbonnet to his worthless landlord. But all his most courteous smiles, and words, and acts, within the doors of their huts, or the gates of his own halls, will never purchase for such a man the smallest portion of genuine esteem. His entrance into humble households will be regarded with suspicion; and fathers and mothers will pray that their porch may be unvisited by him, who knows not the value, and feels not the sanctity of innocence.

Henry Cranstoun had not been many weeks at the Hirst, till he had become the object of such disturbed and disapproving feelings and judgments, very widely over the whole parish. He seemed either totally ignorant of the character of the peasantry on his estate, or insensible to its excellence. It was not a little rudeness, folly, error, or even apparent vice itself, that could have wholly alienated from the heir of an old house, the affections of an intelligent and virtuous tenantry; but this infatuated young man seemed to have even a pleasure in insulting their holiest habits, and deepest natural emotions. The Sabbaths at the Hirst were now disturbed with the noise of revelry, that had been heard by whole families walking through the woods to the House of God; and, to the horror of

the yet simple dwellers in the parish of Holylee, cards, and dice, and other hideous gambling were, according to rumour, rife there, even on the Lord's Day. Servants, with more even than their master's reckless vices, and a pride almost equal to the debasement of their ignorance, and the shocking brutality of their manners, swarmed about the old venerable Hirst; and some part of the indignation and scorn, which the behaviour of these tyrannical slaves at the houses of poor men had far and near excited, could not but fall upon him, who could not only endure their presence, but whose life seemed even to depend for many of its enjoyments on their base servilities and unprincipled cruelty. "There is nothing Scottish about him or his," was the bitter expression of many a father and mother's heart. "God grant the time be not far, when he and his outlandish counts and valets disappear from Holylee!"

Emma Cranstoun conducted herself towards her brother in the way that might have been expected from so nearly perfect a character. She soon saw, with the deepest grief, that she must not hope to work any great change upon him, in less time than years upon years; for his bad principles were rooted in a strong understanding, and his evil practice had made his heart callous. She endeavoured to make him comprehend the character of the people, by opening up to him some of their home habits, and she did not even scruple to beseech him to respect their prejudices. For had she

called their reverence of all religious institutions by its true and high name, she would only have been more strongly exciting his ridicule or contempt. With bitterest tears of shame and grief, she beseeched him to remember that their innocence was the sole portion of the females of the poor man's family. "Oh! brother, as you respect the purity of me, your sister, and would, I verily believe, rather see me dead than dishonoured, respect, for my sake, the purity of the harmless creatures, whose forefathers have even lived for generations on this estate. They have a hereditary claim to your protection—and, methinks, that were any infamy to come to them from yourself, or those whom you have chosen to be your friends, that I could not bear to look at these pictures of our blameless ancestors. See what venerable sweetness is on the face of Alice the Lovely, whose burial was a hundred years ago! But look—look here, my dear brother, this is the picture of our own sainted mother!" And Emma drew aside a black silk curtain, that shaded from the light a face drawn in crayons, which beamed with a mingled dignity and gentleness, not easily to be gazed on, now that their mother was in her tomb, without an emotion, that in its mournfulness was akin to virtue.

To all these gentle and affectionate remonstrances of Emma Cranstoun, her brother was not altogether insensible, and however unapparent their influence had yet been on the general tenor of his conduct, they had at least awakened in his heart both a finer and a

stronger feeling of affection for his mild and persuasive instructress. Perhaps he had hitherto loved his sister more on account of the pride he felt in her great beauty and accomplishments, which had burst suddenly upon him the first time he had seen her since a child that summer at Rome, than for the sake of her better worth; but now he felt the holy charm of virtue when seen shining forth in one by nature necessarily so dear to him, and in the midst of his own reckless profligacy, he paid it an unaccepted and unavailing homage. Emma endured the disturbed and disreputable life he had introduced into that once peaceful Hall, as long as she could do so with any propriety; but her sense of duty and dignity at length overcame every other consideration, and she formed the resolution of leaving the Hirst for a season, and going with Mrs Ramsay to the seat of one of her father's oldest friends, who would probably understand the reason of her offered visit.

The character of young Cranstoun was no where better understood than at Bracken-Braes, and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, had one and all of them cautioned Lucy to avoid at all times the slightest approach on his part to her company, at least when alone, either at the Hirst, in any of the vallies, or at their own house, which he had been much fonder of visiting lately, than was agreeable to any one within its walls. This caution was not given in any doubt of his daughter, but to prevent the possibility of any unknown evil coming

from that quarter. Lucy did not need any such warning, for she knew too well her own danger, or rather she knew what anger and misery and disturbance of spirit there would be at Bracken-Braes, if her father had been aware of Mr Cranstoun's repeated attempts to gain upon her vanity, her simplicity, her ignorance, or her weakness—and Lucy was willing enough to confess, that all these might belong to her character.

His sole desire and determination, since Henry Cranstoun had first seen Lucy Forester, was to get her into his power, and carry her off with him to the Continent. What was she but a peasant's daughter? Her father, to be sure, was a man far beyond the common run,—and he was also a blind man, who would sorely miss the child heard for so many years in his darkness. Lucy was likewise, humbly born as she was, his own sister's bosom-friend, and her kindness, it was said, had even saved Emma's life. She was also a perfectly happy creature—and to destroy great human happiness, requires a cold, or a stern, or a fierce heart. But then she was beautiful—aye, beautiful as an angel, and not less innocent—and his heart, which had so long been the victim, the slave of passion, beat and leapt and bounded at the forethought of all that angelical beauty and innocence being prest in transport to his bosom, although afterwards might come shame, sorrow, despair and death.

Had Lucy known all that the heart of Henry Cran-

stoun had planned against her, sooner would the small singing bird have left the hawthorn-hedge when it saw the merlin on the wing, than she have forsaken for an hour the shelter of Bracken-Braes. But innocence suspects not, nor if it did, could penetrate into the dark secrets of that heart from which pity and honour and religion are all flung aside, and nothing heard, felt, or obeyed, but the cry of passion unresisted in its long career and conquest of crime and misery.

Henry Cranstoun had had his spies and emissaries at watch and at work through all the parish. He knew every step that Lucy took half a mile from Bracken-Braes. Did she go to Raeshaw, to Ladyside, to the Manse, to Ewebank, to any hut without even a name, her visit, if one that had been previously intended, was already known to him at the Hirst. He had sometimes been at her side among the Braes, as if he had risen out of the earth, and had come carelessly and accidentally into the solitary dwellings where Lucy perhaps had gone to see some sick or dying person, or to offer some charitable office to the poor. He stood not in awe of that God whose servant the young, the humble, innocent and happy creature was upon those affecting occasions, and he would have ruined the soul of her whom he might have beheld kneeling in prayer by the sick-beds of the widow and the orphan, or gliding home to her Blind Father's dwelling with a song that cheered the solitary braes, and seemed to leave its music in the wild moors. Her innocence, he

saw, could never be corrupted—but it might be betrayed; and were Lucy Forester away with him into another country—away beyond the seas—cut off from Bracken-Braes by hundreds of leagues of land and seas, with all their mountains and waves, might she not perhaps become his in her homeless—hopeless destitution and despair, and might not his joy—his happiness—his bliss be perfect at last in that sacrifice?

But, Emma Cranstoun, although she had never breathed a syllable of her suspicions to her brother, had been for some time more unhappy and afraid even than Lucy herself of his wicked designs. Indeed, it was her miserable conviction of some meditated evil, too dreadful even to be alluded to, that finally determined her to leave the Hirst, and to take Lucy with her to Ballendean. Michael and Agnes, although almost daily expecting a visit from Miles Colinson, did not think of making any objections to this plan, under circumstances which they fully understood without putting that Lady under any necessity of entering into any lengthened explanation; so it was fixed that Emma Cranstoun was to send over a servant for Lucy next evening, and that she should accompany herself and Mrs Ramsay to Ballendean, where they would remain till her brother and his companions left the Hirst.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Lucy had left Bracken-Braes in the evening on Emma Cranstoun's own palfrey, under care of a servant; and Mary Morrison had tripped on foot by her side as far as the well-known Gowan-Green. There she had parted from her friend with a kiss, and kept her eyes upon her till she saw the horses following the bridle-road towards Ewebank. "Aye, aye!" said Mary to herself, "Lucy is just going round by the house where I used to live, to take a look at the sweet birch-wood, where we have so often sat together in days when I was as happy and as innocent as herself!" —and then returned to the Heriot-Water.

Michael never slept very soundly when Lucy was from home; and he now rose in the gloaming, before the sun had shown his disk over Raven-Crag, or awakened a bird in the eaves or the Plane-tree. It was the dawn of the twelfth of August; and no sooner had the light broken, than the frequent gun of the fowler was heard on the hills. A foot came up the avenue, and a voice said, "Mr Forester, here is a letter from

the Hirst." Michael took it to Agnes. It was from the Lady herself, and expressed much surprise that Lucy Forester had not, according to agreement, come to the Hirst, with tender inquiries as to the cause of her not appearing, which she trusted was not illness, either of herself or any one at Bracken-Braes.

Every inmate was soon up; and a dire and dismal distraction, in which reason itself was baffled, prevailed over the whole family. Their fears all connected themselves with Henry Cranstoun, but nobody yet expressed them—till Michael himself said, "Let us trust in that God who has never yet forsaken us, and whose providence, although often inscrutable, will not suffer our child to be destroyed!" But every minute brought its own horrid thought, and there was an uncertain and hurried walking about, as if the tenement had been on fire.

Mary Morrison, who had gone out to speak with the person who had brought the letter, came back with a quick pace to the room, and said, "Here is Mr Miles Colinson—here is Mr Miles Colinson!" Aunt Isobel—for Michael and Agnes were sitting in a sort of stupor—went and brought him in, after telling him, in a few words, at what crisis he had arrived. "You have come to us just when we have lost our Lucy, Mr Colinson;—a villain has taken her from us—from Agnes there—and me, her blind father; and dreadful are the decrees of the Most Merciful and the Most High!"

It seemed that nothing was in their power to do, any

more than if they had all been chained in a dungeon. Into what quarter of the horizon should the pursuers go? Hours—hours—many long hours had there been—a whole night of hours—since Lucy had fallen into the fatal snare. As well go seek for a dropt pearl from the hair over the bounds of a great forest, as seek for Lucy Forester now among all those mountains! The light of morn must have found her far—far off from Bracken-Braes;—or perhaps the light of morn may not yet have visited her weeping eyes in some dark den, known only to that pityless Atheist.

Perhaps Miles Colinson was now a more miserable man even than Michael Forester. He had come to woo his bride in her father's house—and lo! she had been carried off by a ravisher. Yet, wicked as the world is, there are bounds, he thought and said, set to wickedness, which even a demon from below could not have power to overleap; and a hope came, even from his being the brother of Emma Cranstoun, that Lucy might find mercy at his hands. They all knew that Lucy would walk into a burial-vault, and be left there to die of hunger, rather than break one of God's commandments. A sort of wild joy was in Michael's broken voice, as he cried out—"Oh! that she had the wings of a dove, that she might come flying back to her Blind Father!"—"Fear it not—fear it not," said Aunt Isobel, now too old to weep, but whose hope was strong as possession, both of this world and the world beyond the grave, "safe is she at this hour, wherever she be, as

the youths in the fiery furnance; nor shall a hair of her head be skaithed.

Mary Morrison now mentioned, that Lucy had left the direct road to the Hirst, and had gone up the brae towards Ewebank. A sort of light glimmered in upon Michael's mind. As Ewebank was a very lonely place, it was possible that his daughter had been wiled away thither by some pretence; and he called to mind, too, that it was now inhabited by a person of no very good character, who hung loose on society, and did not follow any regular profession. Such place, and such person, seemed well fitted for the nefarious wickedness he feared; and the Blind Man, taking his staff, requested Miles Colinson to accompany him to Ewebank.

When they reached that solitary house, no smoke came from the chimney, and nothing was stirring about it any more than if it had been uninhabited. The door was locked—the window-shutters closed, or rather the light excluded by boards, and branches of broom and fern. Miles Colinson heard nothing, but Michael said, "there are people in the house, I hear footsteps and whispering." No answer being given to their words, Michael Forester put his hand and foot to the door, and it flew open like that of a childish plaything. Wat Armstrong met him in the passage with a fierce countenance, but Miles Colinson was not a man to be intimidated, and stepped forward between the Blind Man and his opponent. "Is the tenant of this house at home?" said Michael, "and if so, why

has he barricadoed his door?". It was too late to offer resistance to the resolute Blind Man and his friend, for Lucy had heard their voices, and was already in her father's arms. There too was Henry Cranstoun, the representative of an ancient and honourable family, standing like a condemned felon, in a clay-built hut, on his own hereditary estate.

Lucy Forester's eyes were red with weeping—her cheeks dim in the rosy beauty which no agony could altogether blanch, and her silken hair, which almost one single touch of her hand could trick into graceful wreaths, sorely dishevelled. But now there was perfect restoration brought to her disturbed spirit—her kindling smiles revived—and, kneeling down, she gave thanks to the Great Power that had protected her innocence. "I offered no violence to your daughter, Mr Forester—I loved her—and I repent of my gross misconduct.—What more can I do?—Tell what amends I can make—the best farm on the estate shall be yours rent-free."——"Base robber, speak not to me of farms and rents—the dead ground and the worthless dross—but look into my face—behold how God has been pleased to extinguish these eyes within their sockets, and then tremble lest his vengeance smite you dead in your sins.—Lucy, my beloved child, rise up—rise up," for Michael felt her clasped hands resting on his knees, and his tears of thankfulness fell down upon her forehead, as her eyes that had just been turned to Heaven now calmly contemplated her father's countenance.

Miles Colinson gazed on that sight, and so received it into his very soul, that fade away would it never more, till the last hour of his life. But the betrayer could not endure the scene before him, and disappeared.

Rescued from that horror, Lucy looked on Miles Colinson as her deliverer. He it was that now raised her in his arms from the floor, and felt privileged, in her father's presence, to press her to his bosom. There was no one in the hut but themselves—the storm was over—and there was now almost a perfect calm—nor was Lucy released from that gentle embrace, till she heard an earnest prayer breathed close to her cheek, that Heaven would inspire her heart with affection, and grant such a wife to one who would cherish and guard her like a sacred thing. That prayer was not unheard by the Blind Man, and he blessed them both, as they stood together by his side, and called them by one name, "My children!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

Michael Forester would have spared him who had wickedly designed to rob him of his all, the shame of exposure; but rumours soon ran from house to house among the braes, like echoes, and before night, the whole parish was stirred with indignant reprobation. Such profligacy appalled every parent,—the rescue of the innocent came home to every heart; and here there was not a single circumstance of extenuation—on the contrary, all was hideously and impiously cruel. Will Michael Forester continue to live, after such an outrage, at Bracken-Braes? Ought not punishment to be inflicted on the criminal? Such thoughts were at every fireside, and he who could so easily have had his name pronounced with constant blessings, was now cursed as an evil spirit that had come to ruin the peace of families, and to spread corruption over the whole country-side.

Next morning was the Sabbath, and the family from Bracken-Braes went as usual to the place of Worship. In the kirk-yard, one subject alone was spoken of

among the various groups assembled there, and when Mr Forester appeared walking between his wife and daughter, although no one alluded, in the most distant way, to the events of the preceding day, the salutations they received from every quarter were most earnest, and sufficiently expressed the general sympathy. There too was the Lady of the Hirst, evidently looking around for one family—she soon discovered Lucy, and putting her arm within her's, she took her up to her own seat in the gallery. The eyes of the whole congregation approved—and Mr Kennedy himself gave Lucy a look of kind recognition from the pulpit.

As the congregation was dismissing, words of shocking import spread from one person to another, till there was a general consternation. The Lady's brother had been found, during the very time Divine Worship had been performing, lying in a lonesome place within the Hirst-Woods, mortally wounded. It was rumoured that there had been a duel, and that all the gentlemen residing at the Hall had fled. Emma Cranstoun's ears could not but receive the fatal tidings, even before she had left her seat in the kirk, and while she was whispering in a low voice to Lucy, about the unhappy man now dying or dead.

Before evening, Michael, Agnes, and Lucy, were all three at the Hirst. The Lady had indeed need of comfort now, for her brother's eyes were shut for ever—his career of guilt at an end—without more than a few—a very few agonized or fainting hours—for repent-

ance. Two strangers had that morning come to the Hirst, and they had again left it, but not till, from the hand of one of them, Henry Cranstoun had received his death-wound. Emma had not even the melancholy comfort to know that his fate had been undeserved, for almost his last words were to say, that Captain Lorimer had behaved like a man of honour, and that he had justly punished with death his sister's seducer.

The feelings which now wrung Emma Cranstoun's heart were not those of grief and pity alone, but of a more awful and overwhelming nature. Till within these very few months she had never been with her brother, except that one week at Rome. But natural affection does not wait even for worth to awaken it—and her heart had yearned towards him in the midst of those vices which it bled to think of, and would have died to cure. Not a pleasing—or fine—or good trait in his charrcter but she had fixed her eyes upon it alone, with the loving hope of being able to exaggerate it into a virtue. But now—there he lay with all that once ardent blood cold as the frozen stream—that face, whose changeful features kindled every hour with the expression of so many passions, had now but one meaning—rest, eternal rest! The soul—the immortal soul had gone to judgment, and even in the Book of Mercy are there not dreadful images of the world to come?

The Lady of the Hirst had many friends in her own rank of life, for she never had had any wish to seclude

herself from society which she both enjoyed and adorned; and in this great distress there were more than one whose presence would have been a comfort. But during the first days of death, the house stands silent, and dearest friends do not feel privileged to look on the mourner's face till the final ceremony is over, and all vanished. Lucy Forester, however, remained on that Sabbath evening when the others went away, and for several nights occupied the bed where she had so often lain whole nights without sleeping when it was thought the Lady was dying of a consumption—and her presence was again a greater blessing than could be told, during the midnight hours when grief comes upon the very dreams of those who weep.

There was a burial-place about half a mile from the Hall, in an old wood. An open space had been left centuries ago, when the acorns were planted, and in it a mausoleum had been built. The arms of the oaks had extended farther, perhaps, than had been contemplated, and one enormous tree flung a mossy limb across the melancholy lawn, quite close to the gateway of the tomb. All about the dark walls were yews that shrouded it in perpetual gloom, and the sound of a stream flowing in the forest, might sometimes be heard, and sometimes not, by any solitary person wandering into that stern seclusion. The martins built their nests in crevices of the somewhat dilapidated building, and the roes knowing how unfrequented was the place her-

boured below that grove, and. among its surrounding thickets.

The whole tenantry followed the Bier to this burial-place—the iron-gate once more recoiled on its rusty hinges—and the remains of Henry Cranstoun were left to moulder away among the bones of his ancestors. All reproachful thoughts were dead—had he lived, he might have become a better—a good man—even a Christian—for what revolutions have taken place in those spiritual kingdoms, the souls of men—and with these and such reflections, silent or expresssed, the funeral party dissolved away among the woods.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Lucy remained for a week after the funeral with Emma Cranstoun, nor did one strong wish to be at Bracken-Braes, notwithstanding the presence there of one so dear, enter a heart so filled as hers was with pity and friendship. The rueful calamity was such as to hinder, during its first dark days, the movement of all deep feelings on any other subject; and although there were in both their breasts, feelings so very deep as never again to be obliterated, yet the images of Edward Ellis and Miles Colinson either did not rise up before them at all, or if they did, each image was contemplated with perfect freedom from any agitating emotion, by her to whom it was more especially interesting. For in such hearts as theirs, love, instead of swallowing up in its own passionate selfishness every other feeling, strengthens and purifies them, lending to them all much of its own enthusiastic and spiritual nature. At the end of a week, Lucy returned to Bracken-Braes.

Almost unconsciously had these lovers been betrothed—but on their very first meeting, they remem-

bered that the betrothment had received the fervent blessings of their father. Few words had been uttered at that disturbed time, but these few bound their hearts for life with all the sanctity of an oath, felt to be inviolable. Little or no agitating passion had preceded their declarations of everlasting attachment—indeed, with Lucy, the charm of her love to her own spirit was its perfect peace. Since last summer, when her lover began first to be dear, she had been carried away down the quiet hours imperceptibly into the final calm of their affection—as a boat in which two friends are sitting, may drift away down the dream-like scenery of some river, till it is found anchored in a beautiful lake.

All their roamings last summer over the braes, and through the woods, had been as happy as they had then desired life to be; but the earth was now greener to their eyes, and the heaven bright even without its sunshine. Then, their parties had been larger—for Ruth, and Mary Morrison, and Martha, were generally there, and the spirit that seemed chiefly to animate them, was the natural gaiety of youthful existence. But now Lucy and Miles walked all alone into the secluded glens—and all alone reclined by the murmurs of the solitary rivulets. There was no merriment—no laughter—sometimes not many words. Thoughts and feelings often rose up into looks and smiles—and when the lovers were mute in the solitude, the silence was divine. Day after day they felt themselves more

and more belonging exclusively to one another—and dreams of the future brought a tenderer light upon the sunshine of their present happiness. "O beautiful Ellesmere!" breathed Lucy in a whisper to her lover—and as her head rested on his bosom, she asked her heart with a self-upbraiding sigh, if it were, indeed, possible that hour had come when she could think of leaving her blind father without his Lucy at Bracken-Braes!

The long-continued and habitual moderation of spirit belonging to Michael Forester in his resigned blindness was scarcely proof against the intense happiness which rose from the prospect of Lucy's marriage. Although his daughter had been from the first day of his loss of sight so necessary to him, that without her guiding voice and hand, he would probably never have learned to extend the circle of his unattended walks beyond the gate of the avenue; and although her presence in the room had for years been a sort of sunshine which even the blind could see, yet Michael felt on the present occasion, that it had all along been her happiness that was his comfort, and that to lose her, since that happiness was about to be increased, so far from being any rational cause of sorrow, ought, and assuredly would, increase tenfold the gratitude of those left behind at Bracken-Braes. The events of the last few days had shown what evils might gather round her beauty—and if her father should die, what might become of Lucy in this bewildering world? But now there were

to be two nests for the dove—and should the winds injure or blow down the one at Bracken-Braes—the other might still be hers in the sheltered vale of Ellesmere.

The same feelings possessed the maternal bosom of the gentle Agnes. She had never feared for Lucy, except when she thought of her somewhat warm and impetuous character, rather too apt to give way to sudden emotion, and to urge her forwards incautiously at least, if not imprudently, upon the path her heart had chosen. Yet Lucy had never yielded to or obeyed any strong impulse, unless it prompted to deeds of kindness and humanity; and her mother rather trembled at the possibility of her being led astray, than from the recollection of any instances in which her conduct could be justly reprehended. Lucy's ardour and fearlessness in all innocent pursuits—her disposition to revel in joy the very instant she left her blind father's side—her utter incapacity of suspicion, or of belief in guile or wickedness—her quick eager temper, whose anger was neither more boisterous nor permanent than the breeze that comes rustling down the birch-wood and in a minute forsakes the leaves—and her readiness to sacrifice any thing, however sweet to herself, to the more insignificant interests of her friends, nay even her acquaintances—all these traits in her character, at once endearing to others and dangerous to the lovely creature herself, had often disturbed her mother's sleep. But under the safeguard of such a husband as Miles

Colinson, all these qualities would be sources of happiness alone,—time, instead of blighting, would beautify such flowers as these,—and she could not but be a happy wife who had, in the sight of men, angels, and the Almighty, been the best and most blest of daughters. Already was the expression of her bright eyes somewhat subdued—her steps were gliding into a slower gait, in its gentleness almost matronly—the tears were sometimes seen on her cheek, probably as she dreamed of leaving them all at Bracken-Braes—and in truth, Lucy Forester sometimes already bore almost the placid, quiet, and thoughtful countenance of a bride.

The month of August had gone, and the first half of the beautiful September, that seemed almost to court the first stealing touches of the frost. It was time for Miles Colinson to return to Ellesmere, and Lucy was contented not to see him again till the following June. Why should they hasten their marriage? Lucy was not yet eighteen, although she wanted but a few months of that age—months that could bring no accession to her loveliness, although they would doubtlessly bring knowledge and wisdom to a heart awakened to a new and sacred passion. A few months longer possession of their dutiful child was something to her father and mother—and Lucy, in the blissful calm of her affection for Miles Colinson, could have been happy so long as he was so, in years of betrothed separation. Next summer—then—they were to be married—and Aunt

Isobel, who frequently spoke of her own death with as much cheerfulness as she could do of going to bed after a busy day, said that she would pray to be allowed to be present at that wedding, and then care not about seeing another Christmas. "The dear bairn will be little more than eighteen years old on that day—and I upwards of fourscore and five—but, Heaven preserve us! what fine madam is this at the door? Come ben Miss or Mistress—how is your Lady ower by yonder at the Hall?" This fine madam, as Aunt Isobel called her, was Emma Cranstoun's Swiss maid— a very excellent kind creature in her way, although fond of lace, veils, and feathers, to a degree that excited the wonder of the whole parish. Her head at this particular time nodded lugubriously like the plumes of a hearse, although her face was all one smile, and her gesticulation, as she gave Lucy a letter, expressive of a general delight, not so much proceeding from any one specific cause, as from the vivacity of her own peculiar and national character. The letter merely informed Lucy that the Lady of the Hirst would, by the time it was received, be on her way on foot, and with a friend, by the Gowan-Green Path, to Bracken-Braes.

Lucy and Miles Colinson immediately set out to meet the Lady; and, before they had gone two miles, the parties were all together in a lonesome nook among the hills. Emma Cranstoun and Edward Ellis—Lucy Forester and Miles Colinson, meeting at the Hawk-Stane spring! Edward and Lucy had a dream of their

own, and after the first emotion, it was far from being undelightful. There they had stood a few years ago, as they thought—as indeed they were—in love—the pure—imaginative—visionary love of youth, as yet equally ignorant of itself and the world. There were innocent and blameless secrets, that needed not to be revealed to any ear—too dim, in the distance of the past, to be distinctly remembered even by their own hearts—too vague and wordless to be communicated; and as Edward turned towards his Emma, and Lucy looked at Miles Colinson, without any perceptible embarrassment, and with sentiments of mutual admiration and esteem—they who had journeyed together over the moonlight hills, and almost slept in each others innocent arms—saluted each other as friends, who at last possessed the happiness appropriate to their condition, and would remain friends, in the best sense of the word, throughout life.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Whether has the lover of Nature's works—the solitary pedestrian, who finds beauty everywhere without seeking for it—had most delight, in his roaming reveries among the pastoral paradise of Scotland, where his imagination, lending its own light to the scenery and the people, has restored the age of gold—or among some of the richer valleys of merry England, where there is little need for fiction to embellish or change the truth, but almost every human habitation is indeed a perfect picture, ready formed to the eye of taste or genius? Perhaps remembrances come in such crowds upon the mind that delights to embody all its visions of the past, that there is a confusion of feelings leaving no distinctive judgment of the peculiar characteristics of those two beautiful kingdoms. Then, too, for one scene vividly remembered, a hundred are well nigh forgotten. Entire days—walks by the sides of lochs and rivers, are as if they had never been—unnumbered glorious sunsets have been in vain shown to ungrateful worshippers—cataracts are pealing in the

solitude once visited in awe, and since heard no more—and the thunder storms that shook the everlasting mountains have not left in the imagination so much as a whisper. Which country then shall be said to be the most impressive—and what pilgrim shall declare the judgment?

But let the decision of such questions be left to the poet and the painter;—and let Agnes and Lucy, and Mary Morrison, and even old Aunt Isobel, judge for themselves of the comparative merits of Ellesmere and Bracken-Braes. For Michael Forester and all his family are at the Vicarage; and a brighter, perhaps so bright a June never glittered on the lone banks of the sweet Heriot-Water, and the Braes of Holylee, as now glitters on Risedale-Beck, wherever its streams and pools are open to the day among meadows for ever losing themselves in the overshadowing woods of Ellesmere.

It was no less than four years ago since Agnes and Lucy were at the Vicarage, and much as they had then loved and admired it, it seemed now to them both a place whose delightful character they had not in the least understood. Every day gave them an insight into the meaning of every object they beheld; and they discovered of themselves reasons why the beauty of the vale was so various, and never could be injured. Miles Colinson showed them the very spirit of the place; and Lucy every night lay down with some new charm mingling in the scenery of her dreams. Here she was

to live—here most probably to die—and in the church-yard of the chapel, at the foot of those great mountains, her bones would be laid along with those of the Colinsons, who had been dwellers in the vale of Ellesmere for several centuries. Melancholy thoughts often arise out of our very happiest hopes, and indeed seem almost inseparable from them; for hopes are onward-gazing, and the vista has, and can have at last, but one termination. But this union of the sweetness and the sadness of fancy is perhaps the most blissful of all moods of mind; and youthful lovers feel it to be so, when to their approaching happiness there seems to be no other alloy, but the knowledge of the frailty of human nature, and of the sudden obscuration or eclipse to which the light of all human happiness is everlastingly exposed.

The lovers thought themselves happy—the happiest living beings on all the earth—but Michael Forester and his Agnes were far happier. The Blind Father had always been a thoughtful—never a melancholy man—yet if all the sad feelings that had assailed his heart on Lucy's account for the last seven or eight years had been collected together, they would have made up a great sum of sorrow. All were now at an end—and not only so, but vivid and rejoicing emotions took their place, so that even Agnes herself, whose eyes had never been off her blind husband's countenance for one day-light hour together, since the lightning had past over it, could not help wondering at the

change, and felt as if the same sedate cheerfulness of his manly beauty, which won her heart at Dovenest, so long ago, had been restored. But just as great a change had been wrought on Agnes herself—and Michael perceived it in her voice. Much of that same glad tone returned to it, with which she had charmed every heart in the years of her maidenhood—and for years, too, of her wedded life, when Lucy was a mere sportful child, for whom it was needless yet to cherish any mournful fears. Agnes Hay was indeed almost in the very prime of life--and Michael believed Aunt Isobel, when she said, that her child was still as beautiful as the day when she was a bride.

The marriage-day was now near at hand, and there was not in all Westmoreland a prettier cottage than the one ready for the reception of Miles Colinson and his Lucy. It had been built about two years before by the Vicar's only Brother, Mr Brathwaite Colinson, a London Solicitor, who had returned rich to pass his latter days in the quiet of his native valley. But the old gentleman felt Oldfield to be somewhat too dull and lonely for one of his metropolitan habits, and had taken refuge in the Vicarage. There he had his own parlour looking into the orchard—a room full of many gimcracks, for the Solicitor was something of a mechanician, and had a box of tools, by means of which, he bodied forth many things unknown, and invented very extraordinary pieces of ornamental furniture. Few men made angling-rods better than he, and he had been

engaged for nearly three years on a fiddle, which it seemed likely he would leave in an unfinished state. But Brathwaite Colinson had a heart as warmly affectionate as when he left Ellesmere fifty years ago in a suit of country grey—and although he had loved to accumulate money, he himself now rejoiced to feel that he was no miser, and determined to make his nephew Miles independent before his marriage. At the very first sight of Lucy Forester, his heart was more than ever expanded with an emotion of permanent generosity, and he loved her as well as his own niece Ruth.

But although Oldfield had seemed a dull residence to an old bachelor like the Solicitor, it was in truth one of the most cheerful places imaginable, and the most beautiful, too, in all Ellesmere. The house seemed to be situated low, for it was surrounded by knolls, rocks, hills, and mountains, but it in fact stood at a considerable elevation above the stream; and a sloping lawn, carried the eye gently down to a waterfall—for the close nibbling sheep had made a lawn of a field, whose daisies and clover had not been disturbed by the plough in man's memory, although ridges were still visible. Brathwaite Colinson loved too well the picturesque architecture of the Westmoreland cottages, to build on his farm of Oldfield a town-house, or suburban-box, or rural villa. He had only to look at the Vicarage itself, and an edifice rose up, another and the same, with such varieties as imagination, in this case little more

than memory, easily created. The roof might almost be said to undulate, when the eye looked down on its angular and irregular terraces—latticed windows peeped out unexpectedly, each upon its own home-view or far mountain prospect—and the round tall chimneys carried the smoke well up among the trees, that in a year or two must be felled, else they would infallibly overshadow the house in the strongest sunshine.

During each of the years that the Foresters had lived at Bracken-Braes, some small new article of furniture had crept into the house—so that at an expence quite imperceptible, even to them who were almost poor, it was within like the ornamented cottage of some tasteful man of fortune. Lucy had the whole furnishing of Oldfield left entirely to her own judgment, and on consulting her lover, was pleased to be told, "make it as like as you can to Bracken-Braes." But this Lucy did not wish altogether to do—for she loved the old glossy dark oak-wood furniture of the Westmoreland houses, with all its ancient and not inelegant carved-work, and fond as she was of Scotland, and all that belonged to it, she did not forget that the taste and imagination of every one are formed in those delightful days, when every household object has a charm which will belong for ever to all that is peculiar to the country where we were born and passed our youth.

Ruth Colinson was not to be—as she had rashly promised—bridesmaid to Lucy Forester—and for the

best of all reasons—she was to be married herself on the same day, to Captain Marshall of Seathwaite-Hall, Ullswater. Well did Lucy yet remember his kind and manly countenance, and that too, of his pretty sister, the joyful Agatha. Agatha was now already engaged to be bridesmaid to Ruth—and Lucy had, therefore, in that extremity, to apply to Ellinor Elleray of Rydal, half-afraid, and not more than half-afraid that her own beauty might be eclipsed by that celebrated May-day Queen.

CHAPTER L.



ELLESMERE had dawned forth into faint and softest beauty, "under the opening eyelids of the morn;" as the dewy hours melted away before the bolder light, the woods and groves were all crowned with their green and yellow glories; and by ten o'clock, the appointed time for the marriage party to leave the Vicarage, and proceed to the Chapel, all nature was rejoicing in a summer forenoon, as bright, blue, and cloudless as ever shone over heaven.

There had, for more than one hour, been a pleasant agitation at the heart of the Vicarage. Not a few hands had been busily and tenderly engaged in adorning the Brides. That duty had been left to the young —Agnes and the Vicar's wife sat with their husbands, while Aunt Isobel and the old Solicitor were strolling in the orchard.—How blessed was the composure of this solemn morn! Two young, innocent, and happy creatures were about to enter on the paths of a new life. Some troubles must attend those paths, many might infest them; but when Lucy and Ruth appeared

in their white bridal dresses, simple as simple might be, yet not without their appropriate ornaments, the hearts of their parents burned within them, and all the future seemed full of sunshine. Michael would fain have beheld his Lucy—grateful would he have been to heaven for one glimpse of vision—but that was a transient wish of exceeding love, and kissing her cheek, as she sat on the same chair, her Blind Father was satisfied.

The Marriage Party were just about to leave the Vicarage, when all the dogs about the place, no small number, including several nondescripts belonging to the Solicitor, set up a barking, that was answered by a general caw from the rooks on the Elm-Grove. The narrow avenue, or approach, was not formed for such splendid equipage as that which now appeared at the gallop. The kine stared and wondered from beyond the high stone-wall, or scampered off unwieldily in distant imitation of the motions of the four beautiful blood horses that wafted along the Lady of the Hirst, while wide open eyes, from kitchen, byre, and barn-door, devoured the miraculous spectacle. A stronger sensation could not have been produced by the descent of the Grand Coronation Balloon.

The Lady of the Hirst, now no more Emma Cranstoun, descended gracefully from her carriage, assisted by her husband, Edward Ellis, and embraced Lucy Forester. Lucy had written to her as soon as she had fixed her marriage-day, and the Lady, being on her

own bridal tour, had come to grace the nuptials. But no time was to be lost, for the Chapel bell, so calm and clear was the atmosphere, was absolutely heard tinkling with joy far away up the glen; not a few flags were seen raised up over the tops of cottages, in honour probably of the gallant Captain, and now and then was heard a discharge of small artillery borrowed for the occasion from Bowness and Lowood, whose tourists for one day would be cheated out of their somewhat extravagant echoes. The Lady of the Hirst—for so let her still be called—took her beloved Lucy into her landau—along with her bridesmaid Ellinor of Rydal, and meek Mary Morrison the faithful and affectionate, whom she had recognized and saluted with her most gracious smiles. Other vehicles, neat enough in their way, formed in the rear; and although the road to the chapel was rather rough and angular, and at many turns seemingly shut up by old ivied pollard stumps, or moss-grown walls, built up cairn-like of stones cleared from the fields they enclosed, yet the Chapel was soon gained in safety, and in about one hour, Lucy and Ruth returned to the Vicarage as Mrs Colinson of Oldfield, Ellesmere, and Mrs Marshall of Seathwaite-Hall, Ullswater.

Two or three hours of quiet converse passed away, during which Miles Colinson cheerfully resigned his Lucy to the Lady of the Hirst—but as it was not a very short, and by no means a very level road to Seathwaite-Hall, over Kirkstone and Place-Fell—an

Entertainment, which, in deference and respect to the fashionable world, let be called a *Dejeuné a la fourchette,* was with no delay spread below the Yew-Tree. The Vicar's wife and Agnes sat together at the head, the Vicar and Michael Forester at the foot of the table. The blushing Lucy and Ruth were seated beside their respective bridesmaids, and Mary Morrison was not far from the side of her who was dearest and kindest on the earth to that widow and orphan. The bridegrooms assumed already a somewhat important air, and endeavoured to seem as becomingly composed as Edward Ellis, who was now quite an old married man, for the beauty of his bride had disturbed the Sabbath-devotion of two congregations, one in town, and the other in country. Uncle Brathwaite and Aunt Isobel were the merriest of the company.

But who were those three humble looking persons entering the gate, while a young woman advanced a little before the others, with familiar but not obstrusive steps, towards the vicarage? "Good Heavens!" cried Mary Morrison, "can that be Martha and Hamish, and Flora Fraser!" It was so indeed—and Martha had an infant at her bosom! The emigrants had returned from Canada—but old Donald Fraser was not with them. They had left his bones in a burial-place in the woods. Martha soon told her story. The brother whom Donald had gone to visit had died soon after the old soldier, and left property to Hamish and Flora worth nearly three hundred pounds. With

such a sum they resolved to return to their dear Highlands; and having landed at Liverpool, Martha could not think of passing on to Scotland without stepping aside for a day to see the old people with whom she had formerly lived, and her friends at the vicarage. Had such a meeting as this been described in a Novel, it would no doubt have been criticised as too improbable; but Martha and Lucy had each her own romance of real life, and thus far it had been, although sometimes a little dim or dark, on the whole not undelightful. Martha was happy at the thought of passing her days in the Highlands, somewhere in the Glen of Dee, or in Glen-Tilt, or on the banks of the Bruar, or by the waterfalls of the Tummel, or the sylvan shores of Loch Rannoch. Those names she pronounced readily, and even with something of a Highland accent—for her husband Hamish had taught her some Gaelic, and in that language she now hushed her little Canadian, awaking from his dream in her bosom.

The Lady of the Hirst bade them all farewell, not without Miles Colinson's promise to bring his wife to Holylee next summer. Captain Marshall bore off his Ruth in triumph—and Miles and Lucy, attended by Mary Morrison, had walked away unnoticed to their own house at Oldfield. The emigrants were most welcome indeed at the Vicarage, in the silence of that evening. Martha had not a little to tell, and Aunt Isobel did not let her rest a minute with questions put half in kindness and half in curiosity—since the old lady, in

the perfect satisfaction of her spirit, could afford to forget her Lucy, and keenly interest herself about Martha's past and future concerns—for short as her time was now to be in this world, she still regarded those whose term there might be a prolonged one, with the unabated warmth of a heart that could be made cold only in the grave.

As for Michael and Agnes—they retired that evening sooner than usual to their own room. They had not lost a daughter, but they had found a son; should Providence permit, the families at Oldfield and Bracken-Braes were to visit each other year about—and to that Providence, whatever might be its decrees, they knelt down in prayer as happy as any of its creatures below Heaven.

THE END.

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